

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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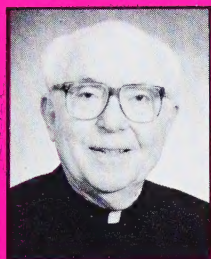
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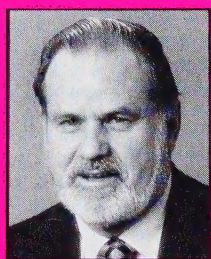




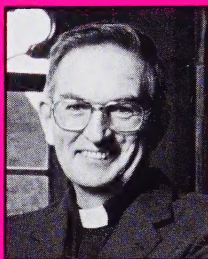
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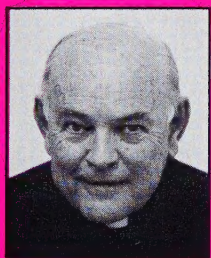
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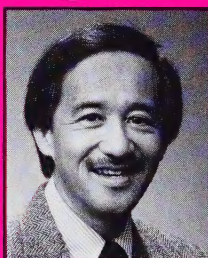
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# EDITOR'S PAGE

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## TREASURING GIFTS NOURISHES HAPPINESS

**C**ollege classrooms and dorms came back to life this month, and young people by the millions bought textbooks, started attending classes, and began new friendships. On campus, this is a season of excitement, high academic and social hopes, and just a mild sprinkling of anxiety.

A few days before the fall semester began, I happened to visit a typical American campus, where I saw dorm rooms being repainted, new mattresses being substituted for old, and gymnasium facilities being readied for the annual student invasion. The library had been stocked with recently published books; the lawns were green and freshly mowed; teachers were preparing to deliver their opening lectures. Cooks and coaches, security guards and lab assistants, administrators and counselors appeared ready and eager for action. What impressed me most was the way those I met were talking about the soon-to-arrive students as persons they deeply cared about; they were obviously set to receive and serve them with enthusiasm and affection.

I left the campus wondering whether any of the young recipients of all this providence would pause to think about what these dedicated providers had been doing to set the stage for their arrival, enrichment, and enjoyment. Feeling entitled, would they take everything for granted and fail to appreciate all the hidden efforts and devotion that had already been invested in them? I suspect this is what all too often happens—not just every fall in our country, but throughout the academic world on every continent.

After all, they're just kids. Their parents have up to now supplied homes, meals, clothing, money, and vacations for them, often without these symbols of parental love being perceived as such—even when considerable self-sacrifice was entailed. In all probability, only when these students grow up

and commit themselves to providing for the well-being of their own children will they at last become aware of all that their parents did to ensure their success and happiness in life—and *why* they did it. That's generally the time, too, when the contributions of teachers, coaches, friends, and benefactors begin to evoke the gratitude they deserve. Out of that gratitude grows love, which in turn serves to motivate in young adults a more generous caring, not just for their own children but also for others whom they might be able to help achieve a full and happy life.

Speaking of giving constantly without one's love and generosity being immediately recognized, there is an issue on the church's agenda these days that I think deserves the awareness of us all. It has been widely reported that Pope John Paul II is considering whether to proclaim officially as a new dogma of the church a belief long held by millions: that Mary, the Mother of God, is also the "Mediatrice of all grace." What this title implies is that all the graces (the gifts God lovingly gives to bring about our eternal salvation) that flow from the suffering and death of Jesus Christ are granted only through Mary's intercession with her Son. For example, Mary, as Mediatrice, is involved when, through Baptism, a child becomes a member of the church and the divine Trinity begins to dwell in his or her soul; when we participate in the liturgy and are drawn to receive our Lord in the Eucharist; and when Matrimony and Holy Orders are conferred, in order to foster the growth of love within and throughout the church. Every impulse we feel to address God through a prayer of gratitude, praise, or sorrow is an event in which Mary deserves to be recognized for providing her maternal input.

If the pope decides to decree that Mary's role as Mediatrice of all grace is a dogma of Catholic faith, we can expect him to prescribe that she also be universally venerated as "Advocate for the People of God." This title implies that all prayers and petitions from the faithful on earth are presented by Mary to her divine



Son. One effect of this dual declaration might well be a deepened awareness within our hearts that in heaven we are continually being thought about and lovingly provided for, even though we may have come to take most of God's gifts for granted. And if we become the deeply and constantly grateful people we could be, our love for God and Mary will grow stronger day by day. We will learn to see all the good things in our lives as personal gifts—health, sunshine, flowers, music, friends, nourishment, education, opportunity to work, family, starlight, liturgy, home, challenges, achievements—all given to us by the Lord who loves us. We will grow to profoundly realize that Mary has a love for us like God's, and that all these graces that can contribute to our spiritual well-being and eternal happiness are being bestowed upon us because of her continuous petitioning on our behalf. Cana, you could say, is happening again every day in our lives.

Perhaps many of us will soon stop acting like so many of today's college students, who take for granted

the abundance of good things that are prepared for their return to campus and who fail to appreciate the love in the hearts of those there to be of service to them. A great number of these young people would be happier than they are now if they could learn to develop a love that springs from gratitude. We would all live more joyfully if Mary would obtain for us the grace to recognize how constantly and devotedly God is demonstrating an infinite love for each of us in countless and wonderful ways.

But we don't really need new papal declarations to understand and apply all this theology. We need only do what Saint Luke told us Mary did. In her gratitude, he wrote, Mary "treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart." That's the path, I would think, to earthly as well as heavenly happiness.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

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# Leadership When It's Time for Adaptation

*Katherine M. Clarke, Ph.D.*

**E**xercising leadership as ministers of the gospel is a complex and demanding undertaking. Ministerial leadership requires much more than holding a position of authority and wielding power. Most members of the Christian community, save for those in the upper echelons of the institutional church, have abandoned traditional, authoritarian notions of leadership, recognizing their inherent incompatibility with essential Christian values. However, as offspring of this old world of hierarchical leadership, we still struggle to understand how to exercise leadership in the new world of ministry today.

In an effort to not be authoritarian, many ministerial leaders—both ordained and nonordained—find themselves backing off and assuming passive roles in their parishes or Christian communities. If they are not supposed to tell people what to do, many ministers are at a bit of a loss as to what to do instead. In the name of giving plenty of space, they end up creating a vacuum of leadership. What else might be done? How does one exercise leadership that effectively uses the authority of the ministerial role? What is required of leadership today and in the future?

To answer these questions, we must look at a key feature of contemporary life—namely, the need to change and adapt to new realities. That is perhaps the critical challenge we face as individuals and com-

munities, and it is the essence of human development. The exercise of leadership, then, must be directed specifically at helping people honestly to face new realities, to change and adapt.

## LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

How does this demand for change show itself in ministry? A large urban parish in the eastern United States has been predominantly Irish-American since it was established forty years ago. Because of changing demographics in the surrounding neighborhoods, there is now a demand that the “special” Spanish mass, normally held in the late afternoon, become one of the regular Sunday morning masses. This demand is giving rise to considerable conflict in the community as members are called upon to change their ways and to redefine “their” parish.

An affluent suburban parish in the northwest experiences a sharp drop in givings when its membership suffers from the latest round of downsizing in the local aerospace industry. The people affected are staggered by the new realities of the work world. Most have never experienced unemployment; they grew up expecting things to go well if they played by the rules. Now the rules seem quite changed, their faith is sorely tested, and depression is widespread.



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## **Adaptive work is difficult, involving changes in values, beliefs, and behavior that must occur if one is to survive and thrive in the face of new realities**

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A faction of the parish is becoming highly active in campaigning against so-called liberal immigration laws. People are struggling to adapt to the impact of a global technology-based economy.

In eastern Canada, four parishes—two French-speaking and two English-speaking—are amalgamated into one Christian community. Because of the scarcity of clergy, one anglophone priest will serve the new merged community of eight thousand families. The pastoral team consists of lay and religious pastoral associates who conduct communion services, preach, preside at baptisms, weddings, and funerals, and coordinate religious education. Tremendous conflicts arise among the parishes as they compete for the services of the priest; they consider the pastoral associates to be poor substitutes. The francophone communities view the merger as another anglophone plot to dilute French culture. The anglophone parishes resent that “their priest” must now serve the francophone communities as well. Everyone is confronted by the new reality that very few ordained ministers are available.

Such situations demand adaptation to extremely difficult realities. They require changes in values, beliefs, and behavior. Ministerial leadership will be effective only insofar as it helps people to face tough realities and to change.

### **ADAPTIVE VS. TECHNICAL WORK**

In order to suggest strategies for exercising leadership directed at helping people to change, Ron Heifetz, in his book *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, makes a helpful distinction between “adaptive work”

and “technical work” and describes the different kinds of leadership each requires. To illustrate the distinction through an example from medicine, technical work is conducted by a surgical team when it performs cardiac bypass surgery. Various team members with particular skills do something to fix a passive patient’s problem. Leadership falls to the member of the team with the most technical skill—in this case, the cardiac surgeon—who is also awarded the most status and authority. Everyone on the team has a specific task to perform and follows the orders of the surgeon/leader. There is a clear technical problem and a specific technical solution. The patient need only lie back and be “fixed”—then everything returns to the way it was. Would that ministry were so straightforward!

Adaptive work is what happens after the surgery, or when surgery is not needed. A good doctor sits down with the patient and, in effect, says “It’s up to you.” And so begin the individual’s efforts to change. The patient must revise eating habits, develop new exercise patterns, alter work habits and lifestyle in order to adapt to the realities of his or her cardiac status. The physician cannot do this to or for the person. What the physician can do, however, is clarify the realities and help with the adaptation process.

Contemporary ministry is usually about adaptive work. In the face of changing realities, individuals and communities are required to change and adapt. According to Heifetz, the essence of adaptive work is the learning required to address the conflicts between the values people hold and the realities they face. Adaptive work requires changes in values, beliefs, or behavior. Leadership must be directed at helping people to do this work.

### **LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES**

Heifetz suggests five principles that guide the exercise of leadership in situations requiring adaptive work. These principles allow for the effective use of authority in the service of such work. Each has its particular goal and strategic application in ministry.

**Identifying the adaptive challenge.** Adaptive work might best be described as effecting the changes in values, beliefs, and behavior that must occur if one is to survive and thrive in the face of new realities. Adaptive work is not optional; it is made necessary by new realities and often involves change of life-and-death importance. Identifying adaptive challenges demands close attention to the realities of the present and the near future. It requires highlighting the discrepancies between the values held and the realities faced. Closing the gap is the adaptive work.



One marvelous example of an adaptive challenge is found in the Book of Exodus. The people of Israel are oppressed and suffering under the rule of Pharaoh. In order to survive and thrive, they must leave Egypt and make the journey to the promised land. This is no quick-fix technical solution to a problem. Israel must move, as we are so often called upon to do, both literally and figuratively. If the people do not move, change, and adapt, they will not survive and thrive but will continue to eke out a mere existence as slaves. To continue to be who they are called to be, they must adapt. This adaptive work requires changes at every level of their lives, in their values, beliefs, and behavior—and it is very difficult.

Adaptive challenges rarely manifest themselves simply or clearly; they tend to be dressed up as technical problems. Take, for example, the situation occurring in many dioceses in North America: there are not enough priests to provide the sacraments of eucharist and reconciliation. One solution that is being tried is the importation of priests from the Philippines, Poland, and various African countries to cover the shortage. This is a technical solution to a situation perceived as a technical problem. The deeper adaptive challenge is about priesthood and church in North America at the beginning of the twenty-first century. When the situation is perceived this way, it becomes clear that change and adaptation are required, not simply a solution to a problem.

Focusing on technical problems can be a way of avoiding the harder work of facing adaptive challenges. For example, when the peace talks convened in Paris to work out a settlement of the Vietnam War, considerable time was spent wrangling over the shape of the table around which the participants would gather. While technical work is necessary for the smooth running of organizations, the exercise of leadership requires vigilant attention to determining when technical work is actually work avoidance.

**Regulating distress.** Work avoidance is almost always a feature of adaptive work because adaptive work is, by definition, difficult. Faced with the need to change, people become anxious. At the heart of adaptive change is risk. Risk is present because adaptive change involves the unknown. A critical aspect of exercising leadership in these circumstances is regulating the amount of distress people experience.

Regulating distress often involves creating a “holding environment” in which people can feel safe enough to do the work they need to do. The notion of a holding environment comes from developmental psychology and refers to the security provided by a “good-enough” parent to a child facing the anxieties of growth. While ministry is not a parent-child rela-

tionship, many of the strategies of effective parenting are transferable to situations in which people are in danger of being overwhelmed by anxiety.

A religious community, for example, was faced with the aging of its membership and an increasing inability to maintain the ownership and administration of its hospitals. As the community leaders began to meet with health care providers to search for potential partners, they were accused variously of abandoning the congregation’s mission, failing to listen to the will of the community, being power-hungry, “killing” the older sisters, and forever preventing further vocations. Sisters became ill, requested transfers, and failed to submit required reports at unprecedented rates. All of this indicated enormous distress in the face of adaptive challenge.

To regulate the distress and reduce behavior that was destructive for individuals and the organization, the leadership team developed strategies that gave people time to adapt. These included “charism retreats” to help focus on essential values, retraining sabbaticals to provide alternative futures, multivocal representation on committees to air concerns and ideas, concessions on issues when possible, and a slower timetable for the changeover. All these strategies helped to pace the work and regulate the distress while still acknowledging the realities that had to be faced.

Distress among people facing adaptive challenge should not be taken as a sign of failure in leadership. Discomfort is a natural part of the process and usually indicates that people are seeing tough realities and considering difficult changes. The people of Israel certainly showed no signs of enjoying the Exodus journey and complained (“murmured,” as the text so delicately puts it) a great deal to Moses. When they were hungry and times got tough during the change process, they began to attack Moses, doubting his wisdom in moments of tremendous distress, uncertainty, and desire to go back to the old way. The exercise of leadership requires regulating and absorbing such distress while keeping the hard realities in view.

Most important, the person or persons exercising leadership must not appear overly distressed themselves. Nothing so frightens people or increases their resistance to change as leaders who appear distressed. A key function of someone exercising leadership is to absorb and contain the distress of the other members of the system. This is one of the most difficult demands on leaders, but it is a necessary function. Leaders must find resources to help them sustain this demand.

**Giving the work back to the people.** While certain functions are part and parcel of exercising leadership,



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## Exercising leadership often involves letting a painful situation simmer long enough to flare up and seize attention rather than simply moving to reduce the pain

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solving all the problems and coming up with all the answers are not among them. When people are distressed, they naturally tend to look to people in positions of authority to eliminate the causes of their tension. In the case of a technical problem, this is often an appropriate expectation of authority. But an adaptive problem usually has no simple solution that one person can come up with, and change is not a passive process. The people facing the adaptive challenge must decide for themselves what tradeoffs and changes are to be made. They must actively take ownership of the change process.

In a large eastern archdiocese, for example, budget reductions forced the cardinal to cut, among other programs, support to an office for interfaith service to disabled people. The hard reality was that there was not enough money, and funding could no longer come from the archdiocese. Those involved in this ministry, including the head of the office, volunteers, and disabled people and their relatives, rallied to face the adaptive challenge, working hard and long to develop a new structure with funding from a variety of sources. They effectively took ownership of the changes needed to survive and thrive in the new reality. They now have a successful new organization, through which they continue to put their values into action. The cardinal could not have done this, no matter how much he might have wanted to.

Returning to the book of Exodus, we find an example of giving the work back to the people. The Israelites developed the habit of bringing all their disputes to Moses for arbitration. Moses' father-in-law challenged him on this, saying, "You and the people with you will wear yourselves out, for the thing is too

heavy for you; you are not able to perform it alone." He urged Moses to involve others rather than to think he could have all the answers or do the work that belonged to the people.

**Focusing attention on ripening issues.** One of the chief ways of giving the work back to the people is by directing their attention to tough realities, both present and emerging. Exercising leadership often involves letting a painful situation simmer long enough to flare up and seize attention rather than simply moving to reduce the pain. It requires intervening to stop the natural tendency to turn away from difficult facts. It often involves turning up the heat.

The work of Sister Helen Prejean, whose efforts to end capital punishment were the basis of the movie *Dead Man Walking*, is an excellent example of exercising leadership by ripening issues and directing attention to realities that people would rather not face. Through publications, media presentations, and personal appearances, Prejean has directed attention to the actual costs of capital punishment, the disproportionate number of African American men sentenced to death, the inadequacy of the legal representation provided to poor people accused of capital crimes, and the statistical indications that the death penalty is not a deterrent to murder. Through demonstrations, letter-writing campaigns, and other political activities, she has raised the heat on the issue of the death penalty. Capital punishment involves tough realities that most of us would rather not face. In order for America to meet its adaptive challenge with regard to violent crime, the issues must be ripened by directing attention to the discrepancies between the values espoused and the actual, lived situation.

In another aspect of the Exodus story, we see God working with Pharaoh to get him to face his adaptive challenge and let God's people go. God starts by having Moses and Aaron ask Pharaoh to free Israel and gives them some miracles to work to demonstrate their authority to ask on God's behalf. When Pharaoh repeatedly hardens his heart, God "raises the heat"—turning water into blood, sending frogs and gnats, afflicting animals with plagues and people with boils, and finally killing the firstborn—until Pharaoh faces his adaptive challenge and sets Israel free. While this is clearly an extreme example of directing attention and ripening issues, the story reminds us of how the exercise of leadership requires finding creative ways of raising the heat enough to force people to face reality and change.

**Protecting voices of leadership in the community.** Exercising leadership for adaptive change often involves listening for and protecting "irritating" voices.



Such voices are often annoying because they announce things people do not want to hear but need to hear. Prophetic voices are usually irritating. An important principle of leadership is to protect “prophets” whom others may wish to silence. Exercising leadership requires creating and protecting opportunities for dissenting voices to speak and to be heard. This is critical to adaptive work because unpopular voices often hold part of the solution to the adaptive challenge.

Another reason for protecting deviant voices is that they may express a community anxiety that could impede progress toward resolving the adaptive challenge. Rather than suppress the expression of such feelings, effective leadership encourages people to raise issues so they may be faced and worked through.

To find an example of the absence of this principle, one need look no further than Rome. The practice of silencing dissenting voices inhibits the institutional church from meeting its adaptive challenges. Although silencing may enforce order and appear to end an issue, it simply attempts to deny reality. To cite a contrary example, the recent initiative of the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, archbishop of Chicago, to convene a “summit” on thorny issues in the American church, represents leadership that protects dissenting voices and focuses on ripening issues.

As we look again at the Exodus story, we see Moses’ fear of being a dissenting voice and annoying Pharaoh. Moses struggles, fearing that he is inadequate and that nobody will listen to him. In an effort to help and protect him, God encourages him to partner with his brother Aaron, assuring Moses, “I will be with your mouth and his mouth.” God further empowers them with miracles to perform to increase their credibility in the face of challenges. In other words, God throws the weight of God’s own authority around Moses to protect him in his prophetic role.

## LEADERSHIP WITH AUTHORITY

Effective leadership is not achieved by denying or abandoning the authority of one’s role as minister. Helping people face the adaptive challenges of their lives requires strategic use of authority in exercising leadership. Authority can be used or abused. Used effectively, authority allows one the opportunity to identify adaptive challenges, regulate distress, focus attention, and protect dissenting and prophetic voices. In exercising leadership, persons with authority must distinguish their own work as change agents from the work of the people who have to do the changing.

Exercising leadership is an active, strategic undertaking. Our communities face enormous adaptive challenges—the work of human development. Personal and communal exodus journeys are undertaken every day by men and women, families, companies, churches, cities, and countries. Ministers of the gospel must get involved in these journeys, using their authority to exercise the leadership that helps people face tough realities and change. God promises new lands, but they do not come easily.



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# Finding Your Story

*George Eppley, Ph.D.*

**R**ecently, on National Public Radio, Diane Ackerman discussed her new book, *A Slender Thread: Rediscovering Hope at the Heart of Crisis*. Best known as a writer of books on nature, Ackerman volunteers at a crisis center every week in the city in which she lives. She stressed how important it is to listen to the caller.

In the interview, Ackerman told a story from the book—the story of Jack Lewis, an 80-year-old Protestant minister who volunteers at the crisis center. One morning Lewis got a terrifying call that a man was holding a gun on his wife and children, threatening to kill them and anyone who got in the way. Lewis walked straight into the man's house, sat down beside him, and said quietly, "Tell me your story." Ten hours later the man gave him the gun.

As Ackerman writes, "[E]ach of us has a loaded gun that we aim at ourselves. After hours or years of talking, the story can at last be told in its fullness, and the gun can be laid down. The story has both happy and sad chapters and parts of it may be forgotten. Sometimes it takes an outsider to help remember or clarify it. Lose your story and you lose the pageant of your life."

Ackerman did not write her book for formation directors in religious communities, but her message should be taken seriously by them. Many people in seminaries, convents, and rectories have lost their

stories and thus the pageants of their lives. Some may have not yet found their stories. Maybe that contributes to their unhappiness with life in general and with religious life in particular.

Ackerman's message also applies to institutions such as families, corporations, schools, dioceses, parishes, and religious communities. Stories about the history and development of these institutions—including their organizational dysfunctions—also need to be told. But that should be addressed by organizational management specialists. The focus of this article is primarily on the individual rather than the institution.

As I reflect on my own formation as a seminarian studying for the diocesan priesthood in the 1940s, it is clear that I was under the impression that the story of my life was not important. No director, spiritual director, seminary professor, or parish priest ever sat down beside me and said, "Tell me your story. Tell me about your parents, your siblings, your teachers, your classmates, your friends, those who liked you and those who didn't. Tell me about your social life if you had one—or, if you did not have one, tell me why."

My story, like the stories of my classmates, was not important. We were to be like Melchizedek: without father or mother, without genealogy—shadowy,



mysterious figures who suddenly appear on the pastoral scene and just as suddenly disappear.

In recent years I have tried, by producing a set of audiotapes, to find my story—and also, by means of those tapes, to help others find theirs. I have spoken to groups of retired people at college campuses, senior centers, parish educational centers, and libraries. Ironically, my seminary education has been helpful.

I tell my listeners that back in the 1940s, I studied the Hebrew language for a year because the courses in scripture required some knowledge of it. I regret that I did not continue the study of this language so rich in wisdom, poetry, and imagery.

Some Hebrew phrases, however, have stuck with me—for example, *tohu bohu*, which is found in the first sentence of the Book of Genesis. The sacred writer, describing the condition of the universe, writes that “the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” That’s the English translation of the Hebrew phrase *tohu bohu*. It’s a marvelous description. There’s something exciting about those two Hebrew words.

The sacred writer then tells us that the Spirit of God moved over all of that *tohu bohu* and brought order, form, beauty, and symmetry to the universe.

Some years ago, my wife and I thought we would use the phrase *tohu bohu* in the introduction to our second college-level composition textbook. We suggested that just as God at the beginning of time moved over all the *tohu bohu* to bring order out of chaos, so must the English teacher at the beginning of a new year move over all the *tohu bohu* (lack of clarity, mistakes in grammar and usage, and so forth) to help students bring order, beauty, and form to the English language. We were saying that the activity of an English teacher in the classroom is something like the activity of God at the beginning of time.

Our editor liked the comparison, but a couple of reviewers strongly objected. One said it was not politically correct. Another said she would reject any textbook that had any reference to God or the Bible. We were stunned. Had she never heard of authors who had found the Bible a rich goldmine of ideas—Herman Melville, Ernest Hemingway, Flannery O’Connor, Margaret Atwood (to name just a few)? Our editor told us that our textbook would never get published unless we rewrote the introduction to eliminate any reference to God and *tohu bohu*. Given that ultimatum, we did rewrite it—but that does not mean that we have forgotten about *tohu bohu* and the many ways it can be applied to life.

For example, the Bible not only tells us of the *tohu bohu* that was present at the beginning of time; it also tells us that *tohu bohu* is part of the human con-

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dition and that all through salvation history, God sent prophets and leaders to show how to cut through it.

I ask my audience to recall the Old Testament figure Job, who is seemingly favored by God. In a dialogue between God and Satan, God says, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” Satan in turn tells God that Job would not be so blameless and upright should God withdraw his favor from him. So God permits Job to be tested. One day Job is visited by four messengers who tell him that terrible things have happened: his crops have been destroyed, his barns have been burned, his servants have been slaughtered by thugs, and his sons and daughters have been killed in a tornado while dining with their older brother. After each messenger has told Job about one of these disasters, he concludes by saying, “I alone have escaped to tell you.”

As I tell my listeners, that sentence—“I alone have escaped to tell you”—embodies their mission. They have encountered much *tohu bohu* in their lives and escaped it—a World War; the Great Depression; financial disaster; serious illness; automobile accidents; the loss of friends, jobs, children, spouses. They have escaped, yes—but, I tell them, their mission does not end there. They must tell others about it: “I alone have escaped to tell you.”

The story of Job provides a segue into stories of modern-day people who have escaped to tell their stories. Frank McCourt is such a person. He is now in his sixties and for many years was an English teacher in a New York public school. He published a story about his mother and the hard life she and her children endured. Her husband was a charming immigrant from Limerick, Ireland, who liked the bottle.



He could not hold a job in New York, so he took his family back to Ireland to live in a Limerick slum. He could not hold a job in Ireland either. Talk about *tohu bohu*. The stories that McCourt tells about family life in that slum are laced with humor, which is a good thing because there is much madness and tragedy in the book. But McCourt escaped to tell his story, and that story—*Angela's Ashes*—won a 1997 Pulitzer Prize for biography.

In *Cloister Walk* Kathleen Norris gives an example of a young boy who escaped to tell his story. Norris is an exceptional poet and a writer of memorable prose. She lives with her husband in the western part of South Dakota. Although not a Catholic, she has a special love of the Rule of Saint Benedict and spends time each year in prayer and contemplation at a Benedictine monastery such as Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota. Norris also visits elementary schools in poor districts in the Dakotas and tries to get children to write poems and to share them with her and their classmates. She writes,

One day I was engaged with fifth-graders in a working-class neighborhood in North Dakota. I glanced down at a boy's paper and saw the words "My Very First Dad," and that alerted me that something very deep, very personal was going on. . . . Given the freedom to write about anything at all, this boy had chosen to write about "his very first dad," and while I left him alone to work it out, I did have several conversations with him. He was pleased, and surprised, when I pointed out to him that his similes were so good they had led him into the deeper realm of metaphor. He'd written of his father: "I remember him/like God in my heart/I remember him in my heart/like clouds overhead,/and strawberry ice cream and bananas/when I was a little kid. But the most I remember/is his love/as big as Texas when I was born."

Norris shared the poem with the boy's teacher, who was stunned because, she said, the boy had never known his father; the man had skipped town the day the boy was born. Norris writes, "It is always a gift—to the teacher, the class, and me—to have a child lead us into the heart of poetry. That boy spoke to our loneliness and exile and reminded us that our everyday world is more mysterious than we know; who would have guessed that an ordinary boy, in an ordinary classroom in North Dakota, was walking around with a love, and a loss, as big as Texas in his heart?" Through poetry, the boy had escaped to tell his story.

While Norris enjoys talking to children, I find that talking to seniors can be rewarding too. It's fun to talk to them because they are such a receptive audience. I try to entertain them but, more important, I try to challenge them to do some heavy-duty thinking about finding their stories and sharing them. Many are

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reluctant to tell their stories, believing they have nothing worthwhile to say. Others find it just too painful to look at the past. As gently as possible, I try to point out that writing their stories can be therapeutic. I ask them to reflect on the writer Graham Greene, who admitted to being a manic-depressive. He wrote, "Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in the human situation."

Had Greene not written, the world of literature would have been diminished. I tell my audience that their failure to write their stories may not diminish the world of literature, but it will deprive their children and grandchildren from seeing them as wisdom figures who have not lost the pageant of their lives.

Neil Grauer's new book on James Thurber—*Remember Laughter: A Life of James Thurber*—reminded me of something I had forgotten: for the last twenty years of his life, Thurber was blind. During that period, however, he wrote more books than he had before he went blind, and he faithfully kept up his correspondence with his fans and critics. He would mentally compose each letter and then dictate it to his wife or secretary.

A woman who wrote to Thurber proudly enclosed some doodlings her son had done. She claimed they were every bit as good as Thurber's cartoons, which were sometimes rather primitive. Thurber replied, "Your son can certainly draw as well as I can. The only trouble is, he hasn't been through as much."

I tell people in my audience that they need to tell their families what they have been through. What



has brought them to this time and place? Who were the persons who shaped their attitudes and values? Write about them, I say, because the writing of that story can have a healing and therapeutic effect on your life.

If that advice is appropriate for older people in secular life, is it not also appropriate for older priests, brothers, and sisters in religious life? As members of a faith community, should we not encourage them to write down their stories and share them?

Should we not be mindful that Jesus was the master storyteller who used parables and tales of incidents from daily life to reach the minds and hearts of people? There were stories drawn from family life (a prodigal son and his jealous brother, a son who makes a promise but doesn't keep it, a widow's mite, a housekeeper looking for a lost coin, wise and foolish virgins, people scrambling for places of honor at a wedding feast). Jesus told stories related to commerce (the coin of tribute, a farmer planting seed in his field, a shepherd losing a sheep, a landowner taking a trip, a man killed in his vineyard, fishermen reading the skies, people building houses, debtors being hauled into court). Jesus' listeners were people who lived close to nature, so he told stories drawn from nature (the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, good soil and bad, trees that produce good fruit and trees that don't, a tiny mustard seed all alone in the soil).

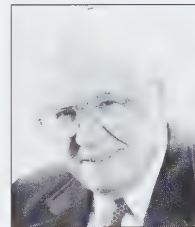
We need to read those parables and tell them. We also need to ask how Jesus learned them. Did Jesus come into the world like a factory-programmed computer, with these stories already within him? I do not think so. I believe that his stories developed over time. I think that Jesus learned them from Mary and Joseph, from relatives at family gatherings such as wedding feasts and funerals, from fellow carpenters,

from fishermen washing their nets, from fellow pilgrims huddling around a campfire in the evening, from rabbis teaching in temples and synagogues, from people waiting to draw water from a well. And when Jesus went into the desert to pray, is it not possible that he reflected on those stories and strategized how to use them to the greatest effect?

The gospel tells us that Mary kept all these things in her heart. Is it not possible that her son kept all those stories in his heart? And should we not do the same? Should we not often reflect on the story of our lives, the pageant of our lives, so as not to lose it?

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# Living Vowed Obedience

*Suzanne Mayer, I.H.M., Ph.D.*

**P**articipative obedience . . . dialogical obedience . . . incarnational obedience . . . all are terms of relatively recent origin. They enunciate the focus on the counsel of obedience that has emerged since Vatican II, with its mandate for a renewal and revisioning of consecrated life. They also signal some of the most difficult struggles of religious, both individually and communally, to reidentify who they are in terms of living a vowed life.

The terms express the postconciliar call to greater personal responsibility and collegial governance. The new model of obedience sustains the verticality of the hierarchical model—the paradigm for the vow, derived from monastic tradition—but also revitalizes the horizontal perspective, emphasizing dialogue, discernment, and decentralization—a perspective that traces its roots to the radical obedience of the ancient desert anchorites and fathers and the cenobitic communities. In the three decades since Vatican II, most religious within the United States have adapted to the horizontal model, at least in concept. In a 1991 report on a survey first conducted in the late 1960s and then updated in 1989, Marie Neal notes that 72 percent of over two thousand women religious respondents indicated that they rejected the concept of a “truly obedient religious needing no other source than her Rule and the will of her superiors,” and 74

percent identified individual participation as a major focus of governance within their congregations.

## CONFUSION ON BASIC ISSUES

What the survey does not uncover—but what almost every religious, whether at the leadership or the membership level, can attest to—is the confusion and struggle that has come with the rejection of the past paradigm and the lack of clarity about the present one. Confusion and distortion rear their heads in conflicts about matters as trivial as who holds the keys to the community car, as well as in struggles over such divisive issues as how a congregation's funds will be invested in light of social justice concerns. The truth is that dealing with issues of vowed obedience and the related areas of authority, leadership, governance, and personal autonomy is critical—in fact, prophetic—for the survival of religious institutions into the next millennium. Portions of major documents concerned with religious survival—from the questions proposed in the bishops' *Lineamenta* to the “key fields” listed in the FORUS (Future of Religious Orders in the United States) study—all point to the decisive position of obedience.

The reasons for confusion are many, but two major ones emerge—one historical and the other in-



trinsic to the revisioning. Historically, the attempt to transform religious obedience from a commitment to a stable and stationery monastic observance of the Rule into a way of life suitable for more mobile apostolic communities has been fraught with problems. As Mary Wolff-Salin notes in *The Shadow Side of Community and the Growth of Self*, her exposition on the evolution of religious life, the move from a central house outward to the streets to meet and serve the people of God shifted the emphasis in obedience from living the Rule—the spirit of the founder, alive in the here and now—to living rules—“regulations imposed by some authority for a certain uniformity of behavior”—necessary to keep the far-flung members within the tradition of the order.

We all have memories of such rules, even those of us for whom formation and religious community came after Vatican II. Many can recall the night silence signaled by a bell, which rang not only in houses whose members were all safely within the walls but even within those whose members were abroad—at parish meetings, night classes, evening appointments. As Wolff-Salin notes, the emphasis on living by the rules had certain negative outcomes, among them a sense of authority as the “enforcer of these rules as well as the person who decided and controlled one’s work” and “the common ideal as the perfect living of all these small rules.” Reaction against such legalism and the negativity associated with its longevity and intractability triggered a post-conciliar effort by many religious to divorce themselves, both personally and communally, from all authority and any obligation affiliated with it.

Another source of confusion, and one inherent in the revisioning of obedience, is the dissolution of hierarchical structures that occurred with the decentralization and abandonment of various authority roles. The call to participative obedience, in its ideal form, involves an empowered membership inspired by a visionary leadership, with both groups interacting in concentric circles of shared responsibility. The reality, over the past three decades, is one that Elizabeth McDonough describes in her cautionary critique *Beyond the Liberal Model: Quo Vadis?*—a reality characterized by crises of depersonalization and disempowerment for the individual religious and emotional distancing and business management styles for the congregation at large.

The heart of the confusion surrounding the shifting attitudes toward obedience was summarized by George Aschenbrenner over a decade ago, in an insightful article (*Review for Religious*, 1985) on post-conciliar trends, as a dichotomy that has existed and still exists in an understanding of what constitutes a mature response to the third vow. As he notes, while

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contemporary American society virtually idolizes independence, self-assertion, self-sufficiency, and self-definition as indicators of movement toward adulthood, maturing as a vowed religious calls for a “humble confidence and personal initiative rooted in creaturely, total dependence . . . upon God.” While society demands independence and a separateness that at times borders on isolation, integrity in living the vow of obedience is supported by two characteristics that are now prominent in much developmental literature: *interdependence* and *connectedness*.

## **MATURITY IN RELATIONSHIPS**

These two words and others that echo their meaning are captured in the research and theory begun in the mid-1950s by Murray Bowen and continued into the present as the “family systems” approach. While admitting that no perfect system exists—whether in the family, workplace, world, or universe—Bowen does see the possibility of “extraordinary relationships” developing over time “when adults relate to each other in principled ways” (quoted by Roberta Gilbert in her book *Extraordinary Relationships: A New Way of Thinking About Human Relationships*). In *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, Bowen describes the forces within such development as “two basic life forces. One is a built-in life growth force toward individuality and the differentiation of a separate ‘self,’ and the other an equally intense emotional closeness.” If we look at the horizontal paradigm of participative, incarnational, dialogical obedience, the same dynamic of balance emerges.

Whether we focus on our ultimate consecration to the God who first loves us and calls us to a faithful



love in response, or on fashioning the truth of ourselves within the parameters of our rule and charism, the tension of the I-thou relationship underscores the psychospiritual dynamics. The ideal of the I-thou, in Bowenian terms, comes in the paradox of the individuality/togetherness balance that he calls differentiation, which others today term interdependence. With maturity, persons in relationship (ourselves with God, ourselves and another, ourselves and the community) find little need to complete themselves through the other. Such separation, however, does not imply separateness or emotional distancing of the "I" from the "thou." Rather, only the person who has negotiated the various processes of thinking, feeling, and watching can make decisions with a freedom divorced from reactive choices, emotionality, and fusion. Only the self-differentiated person is free enough to embrace the connections and limitations of a wholehearted and totally conscious yes.

The three most important characteristics that mark highly differentiated selves and the relationships they enter into are the emotional separateness of those involved in the relationship, the equality in their positions, and the openness of their communication. If we look at each of these as a hallmark of living religious obedience in a way that fosters wholeness and holiness, each points to some critical consideration toward a revisioning of this vow that can function not only as an ideal but also as a reality.

Separateness, as defined by Bowen in *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, occurs when "a more differentiated person can participate freely in the emotional sphere without the fear of becoming too fused with others. He or she also is free to shift to calm, logical reasoning for decisions that govern life." Isn't vowed obedience about decisions, about making choices as an adult who can give the whole and heart of himself or herself with clear-eyed vision and unparalleled generosity? Edward Kinerk, reflecting in an article titled "Formation and the Vows" (*The Way*, 1991) on the kind of formation needed for dialogical obedience, would seem to answer with an emphatic yes. He states:

Dialogue is not easy. In some ways it demands more renunciation than blind obedience, for it often involves more than just the religious and superior. Dialogue presupposes discernment, which means that the young religious must go beyond the lack of freedom which is habitually present in us all in order to offer an opinion based more on commitment to the mission of the community than on personal needs.

The "lack of freedom . . . in us all" comes as a result of poor boundaries, which trap people into re-

peating old patterns of behavior, with borrowing and lending the self a consequence. In patterns of conflict, the parties are involved in projecting and laying blame. In the overfunctioning/underfunctioning pattern, a constant adapting of one person to the other takes place, with one doing well at the expense of the other. In the distancing pattern, an attempt to complete oneself through the sacrifice of another starts out as an intense relationship but ends with such discomfort that avoidance, aversion, and hostility are the result. Finally, in the pattern Bowen calls triangling, there is an attempt to compensate for the lack within a relationship by focusing on another, pulling him or her into the conflict, distancing, or adaptation.

If these descriptions of behavior patterns seem to take on the images of certain persons, local communities, or even processes within larger communities, it is not surprising. Most of us can think of a person, place, or event from our personal religious histories that could exemplify each definition Bowen offers. Most of us have seen local assemblies disintegrate into name-calling sessions in which little problem solving or collegial building takes place and much blaming is the outcome. Too often we have witnessed the community scapegoat, the person whose problematic behavior the group members seem to need in order to avoid dealing with their own issues. Who can't name a "problem person" within community whose anger, resentment, and inability to let go of old hurts are the result of being overlooked or abandoned by someone he or she called a friend? Finally, few are so fortunate that they have never been pulled into a disagreement, asked to take sides, or felt caught in the middle between one sister or brother and another. At their core, all these phenomena, whether labeled personality conflicts or community dysfunctions, concern problems with the relational living of obedience.

## EQUALITY AND OPENNESS CRUCIAL

What alternatives can we seek to the repetition compulsion and reactive behaviors chronicled above and in our own community journals? The answer resides in the other two of Bowen's characteristics of "extraordinary relationships": equality and openness. As Bowen explains, with equality in relationships, "the basic self is not negotiable in the system, in that it is not changed by coercion or pressure, or to gain approval, or to enhance one's stand with others." In mature relationships, the equality does not have to be worked at; it simply exists. The equality is not based on a tallying of sums of who gives what and to whom; rather, it is an accepting and respecting of the other



for who he or she is. Another word for such equality, and one used more frequently in the current literature, is *mutuality*.

The concept of such mutuality recalls a literary example of a relationship in which it is absent, from Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club*. Joined in an unequal relationship with a cold and distancing husband, Lina's interaction with him is largely one of totaling sums. While this inequality can be seen in every aspect of their relationship, it is poignantly represented by the columns of numbers that hang on their refrigerator door, the amounts each owes for the purchases that come into the house. Lina, so trapped by her own and her mother's history of self-deprecation and fear, has no idea that she lives not in a love relationship but in a "bartered bride" kind of existence in which paying for the cat food equates to owning the cat more. Only when her mother challenges her to "lose him and find yourself" can Lina enter into a free and covenantal relationship.

As Bowen so powerfully states, "The human has been slow to learn about his [her] own inner space within his [her] skull. Thus far we have hardly scratched the surface." As true as this is for Lina, it is just as true for most religious struggling to move to self-differentiation and mutuality in obedience. The encouraging part is that it only takes one of us to make a move that can affect not just our own measure of freedom but also the equality and mutuality contained in the whole relationship. So when any person within the system moves to a freedom of self and sees himself or herself as equal to others, the balance of the whole shifts and can move toward more freedom in choices, more operation of will.

The process that supports this leads to the final characteristic of extraordinary relationships: openness. In *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, Bowen contends that "one of the most effective . . . mechanisms for reducing the overall level of anxiety in a family is a relatively 'open' relationship system . . . in which family members have a reasonable degree of emotional contact with one another." The nuances of this process may seem to echo sounds of communication; they both do and don't. In recent years I have seen many systems, from small faculties to congregations numbering over a thousand, search to develop effective techniques for communication. While this is commendable, as communication is a necessary part of any relationship and one with potential for great growth or destruction, a reordering of priorities is needed. Communication is neither the problem nor its solution; patterns of relationship are the issue. As Gilbert observes in *Extraordinary Relationships*, "When people work on the postures underlying their communication problems, communication im-

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## Reordering the patterns can move us from lack of freedom, inequality, and closedness to free and open interdependence and connectedness

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proves automatically. Clearly, communication is less a problem than a symptom. The problem is the relationship position itself." In fact, the examination of communication dynamics can actually reveal relationship patterns.

### ELIMINATE DESTRUCTIVE PATTERNS

Since obedience is about relationship—between God, us, others—naming the patterns can tell us where we stand, and reordering the patterns can move us from lack of freedom, inequality, and closedness to free and open interdependence and connectedness. The signal of the conflictive relationship is the presence of emotional triggering and the lack of the listening stance. In conflict, we point to the other: "You must! . . ." "You did! . . ." "You are! . . ." And who is this you? The leadership person, the fellow religious, even the God who has failed to meet our needs, whom we need to complete us. The attentive listener, in contrast, waits on the Word, the Incarnation of God in the here and now—whether echoed in a schedule, a telephoned request, a congregational directive, a chapter summons. He or she takes the word into his or her heart and holds it, allowing meaning to come and decisions to emanate from it.

The nonmutual stance is marked by the inability to assume responsibility for the self and the self alone. A truism relevant to all helping relationships is that we can only change or control ourselves. When we observe ourselves talking to others, what do we hear about this acceptance of responsibility? Do we parcel it off onto others in a kind of external attribution? What about the sister who waits until her friend signs up for a workshop before she puts her name on the list? What



about the religious priest who blames his lack of commitment to ministry on the poor spirit in the parish or the lack of cooperation from his pastor? What about the brother who, asked to take a position he fears to the point of emotional paralysis, cannot enter into dialogue with leadership about his aversion to that position because assuming it must be "God's will"?

Conversely, do we escape responsibility by alienating ourselves from all forms of authority through open rebellion or by identifying with splinter groups at odds with the majority of our community? This does not refer to the earnest religious striving through discernment to come to some truth about a congregational or ecclesial directive. Nor does it involve those who are really "hungering for truth and justice," sometimes at great cost to themselves in loneliness and misunderstanding. As Patricia Spillane writes in an *In-formation* article (1982), it identifies, at one extreme, the pseudo-loyal member who, because of a lack of differentiation or interdependence, "clings to the institution for security and gratification, . . . which can harden into a pseudo-loyalty that is rigid and conformist" and, at the other extreme, the pseudo-prophet, who "may rebel and express uncontrolled autonomy needs by clinging to a peer or splinter group, thus achieving a security that is just as rigid in its nonconformity."

The pattern of triangling is all about using others, sending messages through another, investing emotional energy in another, deriving meaning from another. Many of us are familiar with the semitragic comic strip wherein father and mother communicate from behind the newspaper through Junior, seated between them. This can happen when we are not free and freely in love. We can hide from God behind work, family responsibilities, ineptness, deliberately unhealed wounds, and unforgiven hurts. We

can hide from others through all of those defenses and so many others. Relationship that operates freely seeks direct and honest revelation. We stand before God naked, as we came from our mother's womb. We stand before others with the same gift of vulnerability, knowing that to be truly vulnerable is to undertake great risk. It is to stand with hands open, palms up, understanding that such a position is totally undefended but being willing to stand there anyway.

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# A Jesuit's Vision Quest

*Max Oliva, S.J., M.Div., M.B.A.*

**T**he vision quest, a ritual that still survives among some Native American tribes, is designed to facilitate a boy's entrance into manhood. The time of his first vision quest takes place as puberty begins. To fulfill his responsibilities as a future hunter and warrior, the boy needs a guardian spirit. However, to discover this spirit, it is necessary for the boy to fast. His body, depleted by the lack of food, becomes receptive to the spirits within the natural world. These spirits appear in visions during dreamlike trances.

When a boy or his father believes the time is ripe, the father takes his son away from their village and into the woods. There they build a simple structure in which the boy will live for as many as four days of fasting. The father returns to the village, allowing his son to begin his quest. As hunger begins to set in, the boy sits and waits, occasionally falling into unsettled periods of sleep, until the eagerly sought guardian spirit comes to him. This spirit will be his personal guide and protector on his life journey. Sometimes the spirit bestows special gifts on the boy—for example, the power to heal or to conduct tribal ceremonies. Continued direct contact between the boy and his guardian spirit will periodically be renewed by further vision quests.

The key elements in a vision quest are allowing oneself to be led apart from what is one's ordinary (or

"safe") place; fasting; listening with one's heart for the voice of the guardian spirit; returning to the community to share the gift(s) received; and staying open and ready for future vision quests.

When I look back on my own life, I think my first vision quest occurred when I realized I had a vocation to religious life. The "woods" for me was the Jesuit novitiate. It was there, while on a thirty-day retreat, that the idea to be a Jesuit priest was clearly confirmed in my prayer, by the Holy Spirit. That was thirty-four years ago. Since then I have felt God's inviting presence in my life in a number of ways. Was there a special experience in your life, whether you are a man or a woman, that fits the description of the vision quest?

As profound as that early experience of transformation was for me, I will mainly address in this article what I call my midlife vision quest. This enterprise extended, much to my surprise, for more than a year.

## NEW ADVENTURE RAISES FEARS

My story begins in the fall of 1995, when I traveled to the Diocese of Calgary, in Canada, to give two parish missions. It was my first ministerial time in Canada, and I was excited at the prospect of a new adventure. The response from the parishioners at



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**As I slowly came to the realization that God was purifying me of something from my past, I was amazed, because I did not know that there was anything from that time of my life that needed healing**

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each of the churches was overwhelming; they were so open and enthusiastic. However, I did not realize how deeply I had been affected by the faith of those people until I returned to San Diego, my home base. I experienced in my prayer an invitation from the Spirit to change a direction that had characterized my life since 1986. After the summer of that year, I had spent every even-numbered summer giving retreats in Ireland and Northern Ireland. There I had found a second home. Now I was being asked to go to Calgary for the summer of 1996 instead.

During my trip to give the parish missions, I learned of the shortage of priests in the Diocese of Calgary and how some priests had experienced difficulty in getting a replacement so they could go on vacation. I volunteered to fill in for three pastors over a two-month period and was promptly booked.

It wasn't until Lent of 1996 that the fears started to surface. I was to spend the month of June in a country parish about twenty miles west of Calgary. This was the location of one of the missions I had given in October. Saint Mary's Church and rectory stand on a hill overlooking the peaceful town of Cochrane. There are no neighbors close by, and I would be by myself. One day, during Lent, it dawned on me that I had a fear of living alone. I searched my memory for the cause of this fear and vaguely connected it with a house I had lived in as a child. In addition, the closest Jesuit community to the Calgary area is over five hundred miles away. The combination of these two realities disturbed me. No matter where I have traveled, I have lived in the company of others, and al-

ways with easy access to other Jesuits. Now I faced living on my own, outside my own country and culture. I was being led apart from what had become secure; I was being led into the "woods" again.

My stay in Cochrane was filled with many blessings. As I faced my fear of living alone by actually doing it, God often spoke to me in the entrance antiphons at daily mass. Frequently, there were passages about relying on God's strength and power. I felt empowered by God's sustaining love.

The pastor had given me a lovely book by Barry Lopez as a gift. Called *Crow and Weasel*, it is a story about two Indian braves who travel farther north than any of their people have ever gone. One day on their journey, they come upon a stranger. After Crow explains why he and Weasel are traveling, the stranger says: "I am going to the West. I am on a vision quest. I am traveling a long way myself. Among my people, west is the direction we fear most, so that is the direction we travel when we go on a vision quest." The timing of my reading this, in the middle of June, startled me into greater courage and commitment to facing my own fears.

As I fasted from Jesuit contact, new community gradually formed in the faces and hearts of the parishioners. I gradually came to realize that I had two goals for the summer: to draw closer in union with God and to come nearer to my own inner truth.

During Lent, when I discovered my fears of living alone, I had prayed that Jesus, just as he had descended into darkness after his resurrection (as we pray in the Apostles' Creed), would descend into my own inner darkness. I asked him to free me from whatever fears I had about living alone and to heal me of the root cause of those fears. I faced the fear of living alone in Cochrane. It was during my next parish supply that the healing of the root cause was initiated. My vision quest, it turned out, was not yet finished.

## UNEXPECTED INSIGHTS

Fortunately, I had planned to take a week's holiday after leaving the parish in Cochrane. Southern Alberta is so beautiful, and I wanted to experience some of its grandeur. I also looked forward to attending the Calgary Stampede. Thus it was that I arrived at the second parish rested and refreshed.

Instead of staying in the rectory of my next assignment, I accepted an invitation from a family of the parish to housesit for them while they went on vacation. I had met them the previous October. Soon after I moved in, memories of the house I had lived in as a child came flooding into my consciousness. It turned out that some of the characteristics of the family for whom I was housesitting were similar to



those of my own family. This family included four teenagers—three boys and a girl. I stayed in one of the boys' rooms. As I slowly came to the realization that God was purifying me of something from my past, I was amazed, because I did not know that there was anything from that time of my life that needed healing. By the end of my stay in that house, I felt a sense of peace. However, any hope that I had finally come to the end of my inner pilgrimage was dashed a month later during my annual eight-day retreat, which I made back in California.

## CALIFORNIA DREAMING

I spent my retreat reading and reflecting on my journal from the summer. My prayer progressed smoothly for the first six days as I recalled events and graces, times I had experienced God's strengthening and sustaining love, fears faced and overcome. It was on the seventh day that I considered the house I had lived in while the family was on vacation. During one of the prayer periods, something seemed to erupt within me. Whatever it was, the sensation scared me, and I decided to cease reflecting on the house for a while. I was about to go on vacation and wanted to enjoy it.

One day during my vacation I went to a bookstore and picked up a copy of Robert Johnson's book *Inner Work*. I had read some of his other books, and the title of this one appealed to me. However, I did not begin reading it until I was back at work ten days later.

It was in the first section of Johnson's book, "Waking Up to the Unconscious," that the Spirit started speaking to me. I read:

The idea of the unconscious derives from a simple observation in daily human life: There is material contained in our minds that we are not aware of most of the time. We sometimes become aware of a memory, a pleasant association, an ideal, a belief that wells up unexpectedly from an unknown place. . . . a sudden invasion of energy from the unconscious. . . . These hidden parts of ourselves have strong feelings and want to express them.

Suddenly, I realized what I had experienced on the seventh day of my retreat: an eruption from my unconscious. Johnson continues as follows:

Unless we learn to do inner work, these parts of ourselves are hidden from our conscious view. . . . The incorporation of unconscious materials must continue until, finally, the conscious mind reflects the wholeness of the total self.

I was greatly relieved by these words and realized that I had nothing to fear from the experience I had while on retreat. I now understood what had happened. I could safely continue doing the necessary

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**The incorporation of unconscious materials must continue until, finally, the conscious mind reflects the wholeness of the total self**

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inner work on this pilgrimage of deeper healing. I chose the following prayer to help me face whatever was coming: "Loving God, lead me to seek beyond my reach and give me the courage to stand before your truth."

On October 9, almost a year to the day since I had felt the Spirit call me to Canada instead of Ireland for the summer, I had a significant dream. There were only men in this dream. I (the dream ego) had on a bright plaid shirt; others were dressed in gray. One man was completely different from the others: disheveled and scruffy-looking, he had a bandage on the side of his head. He shied away from me whenever I tried to make contact with him.

When I awakened, I immediately wrote down an account of the dream, intending to do the dream work as soon as I had time. However, before I had a chance to do it, my reflections took me to the house I had lived in as a child (I call it "the house on Doresta Road").

It needs to be pointed out here that sections 2 and 3 of Johnson's book are on dream analysis and active imagination. I have been working on my dreams for many years, so section 2 was a refresher course. However, this was the first time I had heard of active imagination. The main purpose of this inner-work technique is to provide communication from the conscious self to those elements of the unconscious that one may be cut off from or that may be in need of healing. One does this by using the language of images, entering into a dialogue with them. One goes to the unconscious through the imagination and invites an image to come forth. Then one writes down the dialogue that occurs: what the conscious self says, what the interior "persons" reply, and what they do together. Johnson cautions anyone attempting to use



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**Knowing that God had  
been there through all  
my times of turmoil,  
during the normal ups  
and downs of life, the  
joys and hurts of my  
childhood, my  
successes and failures,  
was a source of great  
happiness and peace**

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this tool for inner understanding to have someone available to visit or phone in case they become overwhelmed by the imagination and cannot turn it off.

Following on my dream and the memory of my childhood house, I decided to invite my inner child to come forth. There seemed to be a connection between the injured man and this child. In terms of the vision quest, I was listening to the voice of my guardian spirit who, I felt, was leading me in this direction.

#### **REVISITING DORESTA ROAD**

I was eight years old when my family moved to the house on Doresta Road. It was our second major move in two years, which is traumatic enough for a child of that age. As I reflected on this, two images came to mind: a lush, green meadow and the house. The meadow was a place of innocence, joy, and playfulness. The little boy was there, as well as a shepherd and myself. There was a lot of positive energy in the meadow. Light characterized this serene place. It soon became clear to me that whenever I felt overwhelmed by the second image, the house, I could go to the meadow for relief—a remedy I was to use more than once, as it turned out, since the mood of the house on Doresta Road, when I imagined it, was somber, serious, fearful, dark. Difficult to be playful here, I thought.

I invited the little boy to come to my consciousness, assuring him that I would not harm him, that I wanted only to help him. We gradually got acquainted,

and then he asked me if I would go into the house with him. I suggested we bring the shepherd too (who by then had become a Christ figure for me). The boy agreed. And so the three of us entered the house through the front door. I held the child's hand. As we walked from room to room, an amazing thing happened. Each room, and each part of it, became bathed in light. The mood in each room turned from somber to serene. Whenever the mood got too heavy as we entered a room, I would switch to the meadow. Sometimes I would stop the process altogether and take a walk or watch something mindless on television.

It took two days to cover the entire house on Doresta Road in my mind, as it had two stories and a lot of rooms. We even walked through the back and front yards. By the time we finished, the house and the entire grounds were covered in light. Even the boy and I were bathed in light. I felt as if a miracle had happened in my psyche. God had healed me of a part of my past that I did not even know was in need of restoration. It was pure gift.

At the time I did the active imagination, I was in close proximity to a Jesuit friend of mine who is knowledgeable in the ways of the mind and the heart. I went to see him after I had finished the inner work. He listened attentively to my story and gave me some excellent feedback. He recognized that some serious, though not devastating, injury to my self-esteem had occurred in the house on Doresta Road. He suggested that the transformation of the house from dark to light may permit me further access to a deeper level of meaning. He also suggested doing another dialogue with the little boy to see how he was feeling now. And, because I told my Jesuit friend about the dream with the man who had a bandage on his head, he further encouraged me to enter into a dialogue with him. This would mean combining active imagination with dream analysis to complete the healing process. Lastly, he suggested that I ritualize the healing somehow as a way of celebrating what had occurred.

As I entered into what was to be the final part of my year-long transformation, I took courage from Psalm 18, verses 1 and 2: "I love you, O Lord, my strength, O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer. My God, my rock of refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!" I found that I still needed God's grace to carry out my Jesuit friend's suggestions. Even though the house on Doresta Road was now bathed in light, I wasn't sure where the search for deeper meaning would take me.

I need to interject part of my later life story here, for it has a profound bearing on what transpired when I revisited the house on Doresta Road in my imagination.

I was twenty-four years old when I realized that I wanted to be a priest. I entered the Jesuit novitiate just a month after the thought first occurred to me. Prior to that time, I had lived a wild life in some respects. I did not have a feeling of God loving me until I was in the novitiate. Thus, as far as having an individual relationship with a personal God and a sense of God's presence in my life, that did not happen for me until I was in my mid-twenties.

## STUNNING REVELATION

One day, during my prayer, a couple of weeks after I had visited my Jesuit friend, I entered into a dialogue with God about the house on Doresta Road. I asked God if he wanted to take me to another level of meaning about our family home. What transpired then was a shocking revelation to me. I heard God saying, "I was there too, with you and your family, even though you did not know me. My love has always been with you. Through your infant years, in the time you lived on Doresta Road, as a teenager, I have always been there."

This was the deeper meaning of the house! I was stunned, not having realized this before. It was a spiritual bombshell for me. Knowing that God had been there through all my times of turmoil, during the normal ups and downs of life, the joys and hurts of my childhood, my successes and failures, was a source of great happiness and peace.

Now it was time to revisit the boy, my inner child. I called him forth from my unconscious. He emerged willingly. I asked him how he was. He responded, "I am fine. I feel so much better since we went into the house with the shepherd. Not only is the house bathed in light, but I am too. Thank you for taking me there with you. I am no longer afraid. I feel safe."

By now, I had realized the connection between the little boy and the man with the bandaged head. Both represented parts of me. The disheveled, dirty, scruffy-looking, timid adult had been injured as a child. He represented a part of me that was still wounded. It was time to call him forth from the dream I had written down over a month before. I asked him if we could talk. "How are you feeling?" I inquired.

No longer shy in my presence, he answered, "I am much better now that you have taken the time to see to my wound. I thought you had forgotten me and didn't care about me. Now I feel wanted and secure.

My head has healed. I have taken off the bandage. I have bathed and have a new set of clothes. I feel good about myself." I told him I was sorry he had had to suffer for so long, but that I had not known of his existence until he had surfaced in the dream. I thanked him for appearing to me, letting me know of his distress. Then I asked if there was anything else I could do for him.

"Yes," he responded. "Please give me a hug." Then he added, "And your blessing." And so I did both, thus bringing to conclusion a remarkable year of grace.

By means of this article, I come to the fourth key element of a vision quest: returning to the community to share the gift received. This I have endeavored to do honestly and openly. I hope what I have learned and experienced will be a help to you, reader, as you continue on your journey.

My prayer is that you and I will both always remain open and ready for whatever our loving God has in store for us, for whatever vision quests are still waiting out there. We wait in hope, relying on God's strength.

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# Compassionate Spirituality

*Franca Onyibor, M.S.H.R.*

**I** have just “blown my top” at a meeting, and I am feeling guilty. A part of me feels really bad. Another part is trying desperately to justify my position and my spilling out my anger in this way, all in order to feel better. On one hand, I beat myself up for expressing my anger after I have vowed to check my temper tantrums; on the other hand, I console myself by telling myself that this was not really me; something came over me. What is more, how could a woman religious like me blow her top this way? It was not really me—they drove me to it! As I keep going back and forth, my inner being remains in turmoil and conflict over the whole situation.

I am a religious sister in a tradition that teaches me that if my right eye causes me to sin, I must pluck it out (Matt. 18:8–10). In Matthew we also read, “You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48). In other words, the religious tradition to which I belong stresses the importance of being perfect. During my religious formation, I remember the many times I was encouraged to “work on” certain faults, and I prided myself on apparent successes, which I measured by these faults gradually “disappearing.” Having been nursed and nurtured in this spirituality, I thanked God for my goodness and for the ways I succeeded in overcoming my faults. Subtly but surely, I tended to cut

myself off from the parts of me that remained imperfect—that harbored anger, jealousy, envy, sexual desires, competition. Indeed, I used enormous energy to hide from myself, from God, and from others any part of me that showed signs of weakness or vulnerability—and for the most part, I thought I succeeded in doing this.

I developed various ways of coping when any of these monsters in me caught me unawares and were revealed to others. Sometimes I tried to convince the people concerned that I was “not myself” when I said or did something. At other times, I sincerely promised to work on a particular fault. Then, with good intentions, I began to do my best to eradicate it. After a lot of hard work, I tried to convince myself that the weakness was gone—until the day it showed itself again. Then I would get discouraged, sometimes convincing myself that whoever noticed the fault or brought it to my attention had something against me. Sadly, because I wanted so much to believe that I was at least near perfection, I denied unpleasant or negative aspects of myself as “Not I.”

## **SPIRITUALITY OF BEFRIENDING**

But then the experience of journeying with illness became the doorway for me toward a more healing

spirituality—a spirituality of befriending. Through the experience, I have been graced to meet a God whose idea of winning was my idea of defeat—a cross. The theologian Frederick Buechner calls this “Crazy Holy Grace,” the power of grace at work in weakness. Yes, I have come to meet a God of compassion who knows my weaknesses yet whose compassion will never leave me.

I still remember that day: October 31, 1990. At a few minutes past noon, I received a phone call with news that left me dumbfounded. As I sat in my room pondering that news, questions were popping up inside me: Why me? Why at this time of my life? Has God deserted me? Is it really true that I have a brain tumor, or is this just a bad dream? It felt as though my whole being had been shattered.

I had always believed in the God of Jesus Christ, the God who allowed the crucifixion before the resurrection. I had also believed that this God wanted me to embrace whatever came my way with complete trust in God. Upon hearing the news of my brain tumor, however, I experienced anger, resentment, shame, frustration—and felt guilty about having those feelings. The strong part of me, on which I had relied heavily in the past, seemed to have left me. I felt helpless, abandoned, alone, and afraid of death. During the days of waiting that followed, I received many phone calls, cards, letters, prayers, and masses, all assuring me of the support of my community sisters, friends, and family. Yet some part of me still felt afraid. I also felt that God would not like the part of me that was all confused, too weak of faith, and even angry with God. I disliked that part of me too. I was tempted to deny what was happening inside me, but my emotions were so real that I would have had to be totally deaf not to hear their loud whisperings.

In hindsight, I am glad that I did not run away or reject what I thought was a monster in me. As I began to share with others and God about my pain and confusion, I realized what Buechner was saying in his book *The Sacred Journey*: that there is pain in every life, even the apparently luckiest. Buried griefs and hurtful memories are part of us all. This was particularly evident in a workshop I attended on self-healing by Bernie Siegel, M.D., where I met people of different ages, backgrounds, nationalities, and religions—all in a lot of pain. Sharing in solidarity, we helped strengthen each other's trembling knees. As I began to share more at the Institute for Spiritual Leadership in Chicago, where I was studying, I experienced being listened to with compassion. This graced me to gradually begin to listen to the hurting parts of myself with compassion.

## GRACE IN WEAKNESS

One day in class, we were led in an active imagination exercise. I found myself in the middle of the sea, and I was asked to look toward its bottomless depths. As I looked, I saw broken pieces of clay and heard the words, “Franca, befriend them for me.” These broken pieces of clay spoke to me of my brokenness and woundedness. This was for me a call to befriend my fear, shame, anger (even at God), and frustration. In my effort to befriend them, these wounded parts of me have told me something of their story. One central theme concerns what Buechner calls “the power of Crazy Holy Grace”—crazy because I could not have perceived that out of my pain and confusion was emerging what Saint Paul was probably talking about in 1 Cor. 1:26–30: “God chose what is foolish in me, to shame what I had considered wise; what is weak in me, to shame those parts I had considered strong; the lowly and despised in me, those parts I counted as nothing, to reduce those parts I thought were everything.” Even though the tumor is now shrunk (thanks to our compassionate God), this long and arduous journey with the news that I had a brain tumor has led me to taste in a powerful way something of the power of grace at work in weakness.

Though all around us there is the tendency toward achieving “perfection,” the idea of befriending invites us to wholeness/(w)holiness, not perfection. By “(w)holiness” I mean the quality of our relationships with God, others, self, and world and our authenticity in those relationships. Holiness includes our generosity, surrender, and openness, even in our weakness. The holy person attempts to integrate all sides of himself or herself. In Christian spirituality, only by the grace of God can we become whole/(w)holy. Yet the mystery is that it is both a gift of God and the fruit of great effort throughout life's pilgrimage. There is no such thing as instant holiness or wholeness.

The attitude and practice of the spirituality of befriending is vital, especially for those parts of us that shame, disgrace, and embarrass us or keep us in conflict with ourselves and others—the parts of ourselves that we tend to deny vigorously as “Not I.” But we may ask, How can I befriend my anger, which destroys community; my jealousy and envy, which destroy me and others? Most of our unpleasant feelings are rooted in our deep insecurities. When we experience them we hurt within and would want to flee from ourselves if that were possible. Some of us attempt to flee through overwork, blaming others, and so on. But what would you do if you saw a hurting little child, abandoned and alone? Your natural tendency would be not to flee but to pick up the child,



hold him or her, comfort the child. Your anger, jealousy, envy, or carelessness is like that hurting child. Children do not understand big words or long explanations, but they do understand a caring hand, a gentle voice, a warm embrace. Rather than put so much energy into eradicating certain aspects of yourself and feeling like a failure when you do not succeed, begin to befriend them with compassion. Through being befriended, these parts of you are gradually integrated, transformed, and healed. It is important to note that befriending does not mean cuddling or condoning. It means owning up to the truth that you are a mixture of good and evil and knowing that God's grace aids you in the lifelong process of integrating it all.

The more I am able to befriend the "Not I" (which Jung calls my "shadow"), the more I meet the God of Compassion, who teaches me that the wound that causes me to suffer now will later be revealed as God's place of healing. And the more I am able to befriend my shadow, the more I can become compassionate towards others' failings. In this way, I become Henri Nouwen's "wounded healer."

## JOURNEY TO INTEGRATION

This attitude of befriending our weakness is rooted in God and in the scriptures. Jesus maintains that it is "the stone which the builders rejected that has become the cornerstone. This is God's doing and it is wonderful to see" (Mark 12:36). That is, the parts of ourselves that we often reject can, through the spirituality of befriending, become God's place of healing for ourselves and our communities—and when we allow this to happen, it is indeed wonderful to see. With this spirituality, our communities become places of compassion, not competition. With an attitude of befriending, the scriptural passage "Be you perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48) takes on a new meaning: God's perfection is found in God's ability to truly befriend all of creation, all human beings, letting his sun shine on the wicked and not so wicked, such that "where sin abounds, grace abounds even more" (Rom. 5:20). Cultivating this attitude helps us understand more clearly what Saint Paul was trying to say in 2 Cor. 12:10: "When I am weak, then I am strong."

To cultivate this spirituality of befriending requires a change of attitude toward the spiritual journey. Life's pilgrimage changes from merely striving for perfection to journeying toward integration. As we

each experience being listened to with compassion, we too may come to develop this spirituality. It is also helpful to learn and to practice being with the wounded parts of oneself as if each were a hurting little child. Cultivating the attitude of honoring the symptoms of my unpleasant feelings as the sacred voice of my deeper being fosters this spirituality. One may also use the gospels with an approach that sees the characters as parts of oneself—for example, to observe how Jesus is with that part of oneself that is widowed, a thief, or a woman caught in adultery. Observing his compassionate, befriending attitude toward, say, the part of me that is caught in adultery may gradually cultivate within me his compassionate attitude towards this "ugly" part of me. Reading books and articles on this theme may also facilitate the development of this spirituality. Focusing—a reverential way of being with all of oneself, others, and the whole cosmos—is another helpful tool for cultivating this spirituality.

One of the many benefits of this spirituality is that when it is cultivated, our communities become places of bonding, which is the result of owning and befriending our vulnerability—not communities of dominance and competition, which are the result of trying to show how perfect we are. Ultimately however, cultivating this spirituality comes from the power of grace given to those who ask.

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# Leaders Face Hidden Obstacles

Mary Jo Moran, H.M., Ph.D.

**T**he energy usually evoked in religious congregations of women in both the United States and Canada whenever the subject of leadership is introduced certainly supports the contention of Margaret Rioch, psychology professor emeritus at American University, that "the interrelationships of followers and leaders are among the most significant of human relationships." Over the past twenty-five years, members of religious congregations have placed increasing emphasis on both collegiality and participation in their governance and their government structures. However, along with this emphasis, they have experienced an increasingly intense struggle over role differentiation.

The Tavistock method (developed by Wilfred Bion), a lens for studying groups and their behavior, "concentrates on the individual only insofar as he or she is manifesting something on behalf of the whole group," as Anthony Banet and Charla Hayden write in *The 1977 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators*. This particular lens provides both leadership and membership with a way to examine the group's life. Additionally, the Tavistock lens furnishes the possibility of examining the exercise of authority at the interpersonal, intergroup, and overall systems level. By focusing on problems of authority, it is possible to see the patterns of the group emerging with regard to these concepts.

According to A. K. Rice, author of *Learning for Leadership* and former chair of Tavistock's Centre for Applied Social Research,

Leadership involves sensitivity to the feelings and attitudes of others, ability to understand what is happening in a group at the unconscious as well as the conscious level, and skill in acting in ways that contribute to, rather than hinder, task performance. But increased sensitivity and understanding are means, not ends, and the end is the production of more effective leaders and followers.

Many congregations struggle with both authority and leadership. It is next to impossible to be a member today without being keenly aware of this struggle and its impact on both the individual and the group. Through participation in congregational life, most members have had multiple experiences that bear out Banet and Hayden's assertion that "authority, power, responsibility, and leadership are difficult issues laden with multiple meanings and bitter memories from the past" for each member of the community. Rice proposes that

the function of leadership is to control transactions between internal and external environments. . . . At the conscious level, leadership is task-centered and the boundaries controlled are rational; at the unconscious



level, the leader expresses feelings and emotions, and the boundaries, which may or may not coincide with task boundaries, are irrational. At the conscious level, the leader is appointed or elected; at the unconscious level, he takes or is put into a role, of which he may or may not be aware, that requires him to go into collusion with the unconscious strivings of those inside the boundary.

## **BOUNDARIES IN CONGREGATIONS**

The concept of boundaries, both physical and psychological, is crucial. According to Rice and other practitioners of the Tavistock method,

work is not possible unless some boundaries that are known to all members are established and maintained. Boundaries must be strong enough to maintain the integrity of what is contained inside, but also permeable enough to allow transactions between the inside and outside environments to occur.

Groups establish boundaries around areas like input, role, task, and time. The input boundary deals with issues of membership, the process of incorporation, and who is and is not a member. The role boundary delineates and differentiates the roles of leadership and membership. The task boundary encompasses the responsibilities of each task group, and the time boundary deals with agreements about beginnings and endings.

Today, the only one of these four boundaries that has any degree of clarity in many congregations is the input boundary. The process of becoming a lifetime, vowed member can take a minimum of six years to a maximum of twelve years. However, while acknowledging the clarity of this boundary, it is important to note that the explicitness and clarity of its definition are being questioned by some members today because of new, emerging forms of association. While many congregations have unambiguously defined associated members or volunteer mission partners through appropriate roles, rights, and responsibilities, there is increasing agitation and pressure from the membership to eliminate the boundary between vowed members and these associates and volunteers and to redefine all three groups as one through the elimination of the differences in roles and responsibilities.

The input boundary sharply comes into play with respect to new members as well. Elected leadership and members of formation and incorporation teams often find themselves wrestling with one another over this boundary also, in terms of who is an appropriate candidate for religious life today. While many members of leadership teams struggle to maintain the boundary between vowed lifetime membership and

other associational forms while simultaneously encouraging the associational forms to grow, and also strive to preserve the boundary between the congregation and potential new members, they have experienced firsthand the friction produced by the input boundary.

In real life and in the life of groups, it is very dangerous to live at any boundary, especially that boundary between leadership and membership. For some members of both groups, integrity demands that they give up safety and plant themselves firmly at the boundary. This situation holds hope because there is no life without vulnerability and an exploration of boundaries; however, members and leaders need to heed their instincts.

## **CLARITY OF ROLES ESSENTIAL**

In her article "Governance in Religious Congregations" (HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Winter 1992), Catherine Harmer notes that in their desire to make decisions by consensus, congregations often fail to be clear about "who is involved in which decisions." But, as she observes, "not all need to be involved in all decisions all the time." Ambiguity about decision-making roles, as well as the group's unconscious enforcement of the norm that "we all decide everything at all times," results in leadership either being unable to act or being condemned for acting on behalf of the group. It also highlights difficulties around the role boundary between leadership and membership.

Operationally, Harmer contends, congregations most often define participation as "everyone participates all the time and in the same way." The members fail to recognize that "what is important is to find the appropriate kinds of participation and to recognize different kinds and quantities of participation." Members have had tremendous arguments about whether each even has the right to choose whether or not to participate.

Leadership teams are beginning to engage in an ongoing struggle to name attitudes and behavior patterns that hinder the group's ability to work as a total congregation. According to Banet and Hayden, they have come to share the belief that "a greater understanding and heightened awareness of such processes can lead to more effective participation in group activities."

## **VIOLENT BEHAVIOR HINDERS GROUPS**

The Tavistock method unveils the propensity for violence that resides in any group. Most people feel safer when a strong emotion is named and owned by a member in a group than when it is not. These emo-

tions can grant authority that is either generative or destructive. However, there can be no choice if there is no awareness.

In many congregations this violence is expressed covertly, and strong emotions are rarely named, let alone owned, by group members. Therefore, members often experience a lack of safety, and such emotions tend to produce destruction rather than generativity. Violence and aggression are regularly experienced in many congregations when articulate members project their own personal issues onto the group. While congregational resources are generally readily available to any member who needs to do personal work or undergo counseling, some members seem to think that vulnerability is weakness. In the meantime, their outbursts and projections so scare the group as a whole that the group is unable to do its work.

At this time, the work of religious women is really to walk into the unknown future in a way they haven't since their beginnings, and, this too is frightening. Thus, violent or aggressive outbursts distract members from their real task, survival—the task of all groups, according to the Tavistock tradition.

Leadership groups are spending considerable time sorting out these projections in order to distinguish what is clearly theirs and what is being projected onto them by some members. Leaders have asked consultants and facilitators to identify these projections as they happen in the large group. The result is that the membership is getting stronger and better able to handle the outbursts, regardless of the level of violence expressed—but the behavior of individuals involved is becoming more and more uncontrollable and bizarre. In many ways, community meetings are beginning to resemble scenarios from the life of an alcoholic family, with members and leaders tiptoeing around the “alcoholic” in case there might be an explosion; however, the outbursts rarely occur when or where they are anticipated.

## DENIAL OF POWER DIFFERENTIALS

Negotiations between membership and leadership today often operate under the premise that the parties are equals. Even though all members know that power and authority differentials are real, there is a strong force at work in many congregations to prevent acknowledgment of that truth. Therefore, members experience regularly the unconscious force of the group to deny the existence of power and authority differentials. The individual member is forced to wonder what the group gains from such a denial. Perhaps this denial has something to do with the work of survival. If congregations do not move and remain where they are because they are afraid of what the unknown

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**Any sign of humanness displayed by leaders in attending to their tasks is often interpreted by members as an abandonment of the leadership role**

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future may hold for them, they are in essence choosing death. That death seems preferable to the unknown should be a serious concern.

For many congregations, delegated authority is often experienced as diminished power. As Harmer writes, “There is often a failure to be clear about what power has been delegated to the leaders. . . . To say that all have power is meaningless if power is not distributed in a useful and accountable way.” For any member to have power somehow results in many feeling powerless.

Rice supposes that the behavior of individuals is affected by unconscious forces and “that individuals and groups of individuals always behave in ways that are not wholly explicable in terms of their rational and overt intentions.” He expresses the belief that

intelligent human beings, whether acting alone or as members of groups, do not behave stupidly or in ways that are manifestly opposed to their declared interests without cause; and that understanding of the denied or repressed causes can make a major contribution to the solution of problems of leadership.

## VARIATIONS IN GROUP BEHAVIOR

Tavistock proposes that in every group, two groups are present: the “work group” and the “basic assumption group.” Thus, in every group, there are two different ways of behaving. As Rioch explains in an essay on the work of Wilfred Bion on groups (in *Group Relations Reader 1*),

The work group is that aspect of group functioning which has to do with the real task of the group. . . . The



work group takes cognizance of its purpose and can define its task. The structure of the group is there to further the attainment of the task. . . . The work group constantly tests its conclusions in a scientific spirit. It seeks for knowledge, learns from experience, and constantly questions how it may best achieve its goal.

On the other hand, the basic assumption group "is comprised of unconscious wishes, fears, defenses, fantasies, impulses, and projections," in the words of Banet and Hayden. It consists of the combined hidden agendas of group members.

The work group is outwardly focused, while the basic assumption group is inner-focused. Tension between the two groups is common and can be balanced by individual defense systems, ground rules, expectations, and group norms. Both groups and individuals simultaneously interact at assumption and work levels as well as at conscious and unconscious levels.

Bion, the father of Tavistock, developed his theory by describing three kinds of basic assumption groups: the dependency, fight-flight, and pairing groups. In Rioch's words,

The essential aim of the basic assumption dependency group is to attain security through and have its members protected by one individual. It assumes that this is why the group has met. . . . In this emotional state, the group insists that all explanations be extremely simple; no one can understand any complexity; no one can do anything that is difficult; but the leader can solve all difficulties if he only will. He is idealized and made into a kind of god who will take care of his children.

But since no one can fill this role and since anyone who is doing his job will refuse to fill it, he can never succeed in meeting the group's expectations. In failing to be the omniscient and omnipotent leader of these people who are presenting themselves as inadequate weaklings, he inevitably arouses their disappointment and hostility. . . . The interesting thing is that whereas the group seems to be concerned about this poor person and his trouble, it is actually more concerned about the group aim to get the leader to take care of it and to relieve its feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. . . . There is often conflict in this group between the dependent tendencies and the needs of the individuals as adults. Resentment at being in a dependent state is present, as well as a desire to persist in it.

The assumption of the fight-flight group is that the only way the group can preserve itself is by fighting someone or something (active aggression, scapegoating, physical attack) or by running away from someone or something (withdrawal, passivity, avoidance, ruminating on past history). As Rioch observes, "Action is essential, whether for fight or for flight. The individual is of secondary importance to the preservation of the group."

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**At some level, members are furious that their leaders are human and vulnerable and often express an expectation that people in authority can't be vulnerable**

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According to Rioch, Bion asserts that the pairing assumption group

has met for purposes of reproduction, to bring forth the Messiah, the Savior. Two people get together on behalf of the group to carry out the task of pairing and creation. When this basic assumption is operative, the other group members are not bored. They listen eagerly and attentively to what is being said. An atmosphere of hopefulness pervades the group. No actual leader is or needs to be present, but the group, through the pair, is living in the hope of the creation of a new leader, or a new thought, or something which will bring about a new life, will solve the old problems and bring Utopia or heaven, or something of the sort. . . . The feelings associated with this group are soft and agreeable.

Pierre Turquet has identified a fourth basic assumption group: the oneness group, which operates "when members seek to join in a powerful union with an omnipotent force, unobtainably high, to surrender self for passive participation, and thereby to feel existence, well-being, and wholeness."

In the naive or unconscious fantasy, the leader of the dependency group has to be omnipotent; the fight leader has to be unbeatable and the flight leader uncatchable; the leader of the pairing group must be marvelous but still unborn. But in the mature work group, which makes sophisticated use of the appropriate basic assumptions, the leader of the dependency group is dependable; the leader of the fight-flight groups is courageous; and the leader of the pairing group is creative.

Most leadership groups and many members can identify with one of the four basic assumption models as the primary motif that operates in the particular congregation. In many groups, leadership is barely elected be-

fore the membership begins the disempowerment process. In an essay on Bion's contributions to group analysis (in *Group Relations Reader 2*), K. Eisold notes that during the emergence of leaders in a group, "the group members agree to designate individuals who are thus seen as distinct objects, separate from the amorphous mass, who become receptacles for projections and around whom somewhat more developmentally advanced and stable fantasies can crystallize." In each case, as Rice contends, the group leader's task is "to confront the group, without affronting its members; to draw attention to group behavior and not to individual behavior; to point out how the group uses individuals to express its own emotions, and how it exploits some members so that others can absolve themselves from the responsibility for such expression."

## EXPECTATIONS OF PERFECTION

Any sign of humanness displayed by leaders in attending to their tasks is often interpreted by members as an abandonment of the leadership role. In time, the humanness of leadership becomes intolerable; in fact, it is not allowed. "Followers depend on their leaders to identify their goal, to devise ways of reaching it, and to lead towards it," writes Rice; "a leader who fails, or even falters, as inevitably he sometimes must, deprives his followers of satisfaction and hence earns their hatred." At some level, members are furious that their leaders are human and vulnerable and often express an expectation that people in authority can't be vulnerable. The concern for security and protection is consistently voiced by members at large group gatherings. In addition, members repeatedly express a wish for perfection, both on the part of leadership and from one another.

In recent years, I believe, many religious congregations have not really authorized their leadership to lead. Many in leadership are charged by membership to facilitate but are cautioned against ever initiating. Thus, the ability of current leadership teams to lead effectively is influenced in large measure by the

way authority is or is not vested in them. Similarly, leaders often fail to authorize their staff cleanly and clearly, and consequently the staff does not work as effectively as it might.

Considering many of the concepts, dilemmas, and ever-present unconscious dynamics in groups that accompany the exercise of leadership and authority, the Tavistock method may prove a helpful lens through which to both assess the present reality between leadership and membership and to plan for a future in the new millennium.

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# "Our Father" Persists

*James Torrens, S.J.*

## Pop

The human rasp! a snore evoking  
smiles all round the bus  
this sixth of August, suggesting  
no less than a soul in bliss.  
Reminds me of my father, outstretched  
on a chaise longue or home from work,  
today on his birthday, a notch  
on the family tree, that live oak.  
This time of year, head toweled  
for sweat, he crammed the blackberry pail  
or, hand in his hand, we bowled  
into Pacific waves, with no sun oil.  
What lasts of you, Pop? Anxiety,  
flip side of piety. The neatness gene  
(not mine). Baseball as thing of beauty,  
and hiking. A taste for ice cream.  
Above all, not raising your voice  
or hand. Downgrading no one, longer  
than a quiet chuckle. And in a trice  
waving at some perfect stranger.

**S**ometimes I feel like a motherless child," says the Negro spiritual. Nothing more forlorn than that. But in our times, how very many end up feeling fatherless. They have never or barely known a father,

or they have known a troubled one all too well. Add to that the collapse of authority and rank in a society based on exchange between equals. The theologian Walter Kasper sums up the prevailing temper in *The God of Jesus Christ*: "Emancipation from all imposed dependencies is a watchword that applies to the whole modern age."

Blessed are those who can still say calmly and with some brightness, "our father." Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, in a chapter about "God the Father" in *God—His & Hers* (a book she coauthored with Jürgen Moltmann), admits to warm memories of her own male parent, who died when she was eight: "God—the Father—goes deep into the roots of my own experience of a father." She reflects that "we can no longer put God in heaven and separate him from our personal experiences." My own poem draws on a basically positive experience with the same implication.

Using the same logic, a more troubled family history will make it more difficult, perhaps excruciating, to pronounce this divine name. As if this were not blockage enough for most people, the pressures of critical thinking urge us to ferret out all religious projections and to regard anyone as "unsound for not being able to distinguish between his own fantasies and the wholly other reality of God," to quote Jürgen Moltmann, writing in a chapter of *God—His & Hers* entitled "God as Mother" (the theological Moltmanns seem to not quite agree!).

Leonardo Boff of Brazil, the liberation theologian with the same German training as the Moltmanns', offers a helpful perspective in *The Lord's Prayer: The Prayer of Integral Liberation*. Boff gives us a list of primitive people who "used this expression to translate the idea of absolute dependence on God, and at the same time to denote an inviolable respect and unrestricted trust." For them, "father" was particularly a title of honor, acknowledging "the authority, power, and wisdom of the elders." This was long before Nietzsche and Freud, those "masters of suspicion" whose contribution Boff nonetheless welcomes; they "exercise a purifying action on the true faith."

The term *father*, it turns out, almost necessarily introduces tension. The "father-child relation," according to Kasper, symbolizes the human condition, expressing "the fact that human freedom is a conditioned and finite freedom." The father, "protector and nourisher of life, . . . represents power and authority, the binding order, as well as gift, goodness, solicitude, and aid." Not an easy mix! (It was not easy for my father, anxious in his life about measuring up to his calling before God yet receptive to the authentic message of kindness, tenderness.) This is "an inalienable aspect of being human," Kasper writes, adding wistfully that "against this background the full extent of the present crisis becomes visible."

Kasper, a scholar in Christology before becoming bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, notes how the Bible associates the father motif with "the idea of the future and hope of the new," stressing as it does "the forgiving and merciful paternal love of God." He notes that "no sexist exclusivity" is intended by the biblical term, "for the Old Testament can translate the Father's loving mercy into the language of womanliness and motherhood, as in Isaiah 66:13."

As Kasper points out, we need to reverse direction, drawing our idea of "father" not primarily from around us: "In all truth the dignity of father belongs to God alone." Look to God's fatherhood for the norm, the critical standard and true image. Saint Paul put it tellingly: "I bow my knee before the Father from whom all fatherliness is named" (Eph. 3:15).

Jesus, son of Mary and of the Most High, gave a special tone to the concept of "father," making it the very center of his language and teaching, as it was of his experience of God. The word *father* was continually in his mouth. Even such sticklers as the members of the Jesus Seminar, trying to isolate in the New Testament what came indisputably from the mouth of Jesus, have to agree that this is direct from him and quintessentially him. Leonardo Boff gets to the essential:

Calling God "Abba" (dearest father, dad, papa) is one of the most salient characteristics of the historical Jesus. Abba belongs to the language of childhood and the home, a diminutive of endearment that was also used by adults for their own fathers and older persons for whom they wished to show respect. It had never entered into anyone's head to use this familiar, commonplace expression to refer to God. That would be failing to show respect.

The piety of Jesus, concentrated in the phrases of prayer he taught to his disciples, had a mighty impact on one of the most radical and deeply religious women of our time, Simone Weil. In *Waiting for God*, her writings from the thirties and forties, this Jewish-Christian pilgrim makes abundantly clear her fondness for the Our Father, an attraction that cannot be explained by her conventional parents. She was irresistibly drawn to this prayer; it uplifted her; she found in it nourishment each day. Only the poem "Love" by George Herbert seems to have had remotely the same effect on her.

Indeed, the Our Father is a compendium. It invokes the divine name, sacrosanct to Jews. It identifies the petitioner as a family member, part of a community, not a solo aspirant to God. It clears up misconceptions and folk images of heaven: heaven is at the heart of God, is indeed the magnetic presence. It begs that the sway of God, as spelled out in the teachings of Jesus, may affect what people are doing and eventually come to its fullness. It expresses submission, that attitude most cherished by Muslims (*Islam* means "submission"), but also voices the difficult "yes" of Jesus.

## A PRAYER FOR ALL NEEDS

In the Lord's Prayer, we plead as children for our daily nourishment of body and spirit, professing total dependence on the Provider. The Catholic understanding gives to this "daily bread" the overtones of the Eucharist. In the most challenging petition of all, we undertake to forgive any who have injured us, taught by the forgiveness that we trust we will receive. Then, at a vulnerable moment, we admit the limits to our goodness and ask that we not be pushed beyond them—or that our grace be expanded to the measure of what we face. And when the Day of Judgment—of crisis and reckoning—comes, may all of us not fall short. We conclude with a look at our world shadowed by evil, and pray to be led forth from it by a fatherly hand. Amen, so be it—double underline.

Not, to repeat, that the Lord's Prayer comes easily to our lips. Leonardo Boff goes back to the question alluded to by Walter Kasper: "How shall we pray the Lord's Prayer in a fatherless world?" "God is in

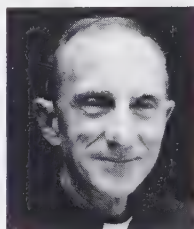


heaven," Boff allows, "not on earth; this distance is always a fact." Still, as he notes, faith helps us establish the filial relationship:

Although we are moving more and more into a society with increasingly impersonal, egalitarian ties (and this is what the world wants . . .), we still cannot concede that the father figure has been eliminated. . . . The relationship we have established with the Father-God does not grow out of an infantile, neurotic dependence but out of autonomy and a freely-made decision. . . . [Ours] is not the religion of resignation and frustration but of dignity, the courage to keep up the two polarities that have to be maintained—of faithfulness to heaven and faithfulness to the earth, of hope against hope.

The closer I attend to the Our Father, the more convinced I become that the Eucharistic liturgy is building up to its recital. Liturgically, we find this prayer to be highlighted in particular on Good Friday, where the Kingdom is inaugurated mysterically, by the offering of Jesus, and the "bread of angels" is given to us sinful disciples.

My father, an Irish American steeped in the Sacred Heart devotion, secretary of the Holy Name Society, had a favorite phrase for my brother and me at the end of the day. As we started upstairs toward our rooms, he would call out, in Italian that he had learned from my mother, "Non dimenticare le preghiere" ("Don't forget your prayers"). Despite all the changes of culture and all the revisionist pressures, who can forget the Our Father?



Father James Torrens, S.J., is an associate editor of *America*.

### ***Human Sexuality Program***

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# The Art of Making Referrals

*Fran A. Repka, R.S.M., Ed.D.*

**R**ecently, 100 new leaders of congregations of women religious convened in Burlingame, California, for a workshop sponsored by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Several participants at that gathering requested assistance regarding the how-to's of referrals. This article is for them and other leaders who journey with religious.

Referral is a special ministry to which all leaders are called. The aim of a good referral is not to connect someone to a service but to genuinely understand and respond to another's need. Referral is caring in its most pastoral sense. In essence, it is a call to life—a call to assist others in being fully alive.

Connecting women religious with effective psychological treatment in this age of managed care can be a challenge, yet it is crucial. Receiving less-than-adequate treatment can mean prolonged and sometimes unnecessary suffering for the individual, perpetuation of undesirable behavior, protracted distress for the person's community, and perhaps a need for further therapy in a different setting at additional financial expense.

Many referrals are successfully processed, but not all of them are. Leaders at a recent conference shared several examples of psychological referrals gone awry:

- Sexually and physically abused sister-clients who have seen therapists for twenty to forty years and are told not to talk about the past abuse, which quite consistently pushes to the surface to be healed.
- Sister-clients who complain that they knew more about their therapists' lives than the therapists ever came to know about theirs. "It wasn't working," they say, and so the clients quit before the issues could be resolved.
- Sister-clients who were abused by therapists while being told they were depressed because of sexual repression.
- Sister-clients who were confused about past (sometimes twenty years ago) and current advice to masturbate at least twice a week in order to stay healthy. Other sisters were told they should masturbate to relieve stress. Unfortunately, such advice continues to be dispensed in the 1990s.
- Sisters who have been in treatment for years but for whom nothing has changed emotionally, behaviorally, or spiritually.

## TEN STEPS FOR REFERRAL

By genuinely understanding an individual's needs, one can more closely approximate an adequate re-



ferral source. Following are ten steps to a good-enough referral. As you walk through these steps, it is helpful to have a specific situation in mind.

**Be aware of your own feelings toward psychological treatment or professional help.** Before a leader can genuinely walk with a person in pain, the leader must first attend to her own feelings and thoughts regarding counseling, psychotherapy, inpatient services, medications, addictions treatment, etc. Some leaders carry feelings of fear that can have a negative impact on the referral process—(a) fear that they may not make a good-enough referral; (b) fear that their anger at the person being referred will be evident; (c) fear that they may experience guilt and shame (“I’m not sure I’m doing the right thing,” or “Who am I to suggest she get help?”); (d) fear of a loss of relationship if the leader has had a positive prior relationship with the person being referred; (e) fear of failure that the referral will fall through; and (f) fear of the whole arena of counseling and psychology due to lack of experience or misconceptions. Other leaders carry omnipotent fantasies (“I can save her”). To facilitate positive referral outcomes and to engage in a kind of reality-testing regarding one’s own inner feelings and perceptions, it is helpful to talk such feelings over with other team members, a spiritual director, or a consultant.

**Establish an accepting quality in the relationship.** It is absolutely essential that the leader (or designate) truly care for the individual in a loving way, or the referral is doomed from the start. “She’s had nothing to say to me all these years, and now she wants to send me to a shrink,” said one sister. Find a person who genuinely cares about the individual needing treatment and schedule a meeting at a time convenient for both parties. Prior to the meeting, take the sister-in-need to prayer. Image her in a positive way. Imagine your interaction with her bathed in holy light. This can do wonders for a positive attitude, no matter how obnoxious the behavior.

When the person’s resistance is strong, it is helpful to meet a couple of times to accurately assess her status. Make sure there is no physical cause for the problem. Find a quiet, comfortable place to talk (i.e., not at a congregational meeting or gathering). Assess the level of resistance. Maintain an atmosphere of empathic caring.

**Assess the sister’s readiness for referral.** It is relatively easy to provide referral sources to a person requesting them when that person experiences a readiness to move forward in her growth process. However, not all women religious experience such readiness. In fact, some will view a suggestion to

seek assistance as a threat. Leaders tend to make better referrals when they can assess:

- how open the person is to the idea,
- whether the person feels that the referral is necessary,
- whether the person is hurting enough to benefit from the referral,
- whether the person’s level of resistance is too strong, and
- how the referral will be interpreted by the person with the perceived need.

A word about resistance. It is often helpful to view resistance as a potentially positive reality. Resistance is energy. Energy that drives the resistance comes from the same source as the person’s strength. Finding a creative way to transform this energy can emancipate a person from feeling trapped. Following are some aids in this regard.

**Actively listen.** Listen for strengths in the individual, as well as felt limitations. Begin to assess how the person feels about how things are going in terms of her personal and ministerial life. Invite the person to explore with you. The use of empathic skills is invaluable in helping someone to see what others are seeing (“Tell me how the year is going for you,” or “It’s been difficult for you,” or “Finding yourself alone in this has to be painful”). When we empathically listen, it tends to relax the individual and serves to restore functioning by reducing the pressure of pent-up feelings, thereby giving the person a sense of hope. It is facilitative, then, to explore behavior, incidents, and specific concrete data with the person in need of referral so that she can begin to see patterns. Remarks such as “You’ve always resisted authority” are unlikely to encourage openness or a letting down of defenses.

**Give and receive feedback.** During the conversation, it is important to give constant verbal feedback about what you hear and to receive verbal feedback from the person in need regarding what they are hearing from you. Use empathic listening skills to assess how the person feels about what you have just said or suggested. Don’t assume that the one in need of help will understand things the way you mean them or follow through on whatever you suggest. For example, it is helpful to say something like, “These are some ideas, but I need to hear from you how this sounds,” or “I think this needs to be done, but I wonder what thoughts you have on this.”

**Help the person clarify issues and explore alternatives.** Assisting the person in naming the problem

(depression, anxiety, addiction, fear, difficulties in relationships, inability to make or keep friends) can bring relief to an individual in need. Together you can then objectively review the situation and achieve a broader and more constructive perspective. Naming the issue will also help the person connect with the appropriate resource and articulate the problem more clearly to helping professionals. If there are numerous issues, slow the individual down, name the issues one at a time, and offer hope of resolution, starting with the major issues. All this, of course, is done *with* the person, not *for* the person. At every juncture, encourage the individual to be self-directed by maintaining an adult-to-adult paradigm. When one feels responsible *for* a person and not responsible *to* her, one tends to become overprotective, controlling, and manipulative. On the other hand, when one feels responsible *to* or *with* another, one tends to feel more relaxed, empathic, and sensitive to the other's feelings and can more comfortably confront the person, having earned the right to confront.

**Do your homework regarding resource possibilities.** It is helpful to research possible therapies ahead of time, even if this may not be necessary for a particular situation at a particular time. Listen to your hunches. For example, if you feel that a person may need a referral to a therapist, have at least three names ready. If you see evidence that addiction is the problem, have resources in mind.

A few words about therapeutic resource selection. One should shop for a therapist as one would for a surgeon or a lawyer. A life is at stake. For psychotherapy, it is best to refer to a credentialed, experienced therapist known to get results with women religious. An effective therapist:

- assesses holistically (i.e., does a biopsychosocial history, assesses support systems, diet, exercise, hygiene, medicines, etc.).
- sets realistic goals *with* the person coming for treatment and matches style of treatment with the presenting complaint. In other words, the therapist is able to explain why a certain treatment would be best for a certain need or disorder. If I come in because my foot hurts and the professional wants to do exploratory abdominal surgery, something is wrong. If I come for help with situational depression and the therapist has a hunch that I've been sexually abused and actively fishes for that, something is amiss.
- does not try to do psychotherapy with persons who are using addictive substances. Addictions need to be addressed first. One cannot accomplish psychological treatment with a brain bathed in al-

cohol or drugs. Sending the person to Alcoholics Anonymous or a detoxification program either prior to or during treatment is appropriate.

- lets clients go if they are not working, or if the therapist cannot assess their motivation to work. Of course, the therapist clearly informs clients of the consequences of not taking care of their problems and provides them with alternatives.
- remains relationship-oriented and goal-oriented. Some therapists try to do everything—movement therapy, eye-movement desensitization reprocessing (EMDR), talk therapy, light-box therapy—in an attempt to find “the right cure.” There is nothing wrong with any of these therapies—in fact, many of them can be quite helpful—but the therapist must be able to explain why a given therapy is helpful for a particular issue facing a particular client.

Effective therapists explain in down-to-earth terms why they are doing what they are doing. Avoid technique-oriented or gimmick-oriented therapists. As one sister put it, “I’ve been through Roling, twelve-step groups, gestalt groups, and recently EMDR, told my story a thousand times, and still I haven’t gotten to the issue, to the feeling in the pit of my stomach.”

It is important to remember that usually therapists are credentialed by the state in which they practice, but they are not all trained to perform psychotherapy. Some psychiatrists, for example, are skilled in case management and the overseeing of medication but not in psychotherapy. Many psychologists are trained to do research and testing but not psychotherapy. Social workers may be competent in attending to social needs but some know little about psychotherapy. The same holds true for nurses, pastoral counselors, and addiction counselors. It is appropriate and recommended that leaders ask therapists about their credentials, training, and experience in working with a religious population. Generally, the most effective short-term therapists are those with training in both in-depth and short-term treatment.

Choosing an inpatient or outpatient program should be done just as carefully. Take note of success stories or non-success stories in relation to various programs. Word-of-mouth is still the best advertising, and experience remains one of the best teachers. Some questions to consider:

- Does the need of the individual match the goals of the program?
- Are the credentials of the staff appropriate to the program?
- Was the person in need involved in the choice? (Commitment to the program is often deeper if the person was involved in the choice all along.)



- What is the quality of the care? What does the program say it will do, and how does it accomplish its goals? Does it make sense to you?
- Is there follow-up or an aftercare program?
- Have you conversed with others who have been in the program or who know about the program?

If you have ascertained that an individual is in need of specialized help, you may want to call around for resources, but the choice of treatment should be made together with her.

**Together make a choice for treatment.** After the issue is clarified and alternatives are explored, it is important to choose the best alternative and take at least a small step toward implementing a choice. Again, make sure the person is involved in all stages of the planning. For example, if an addictions-oriented program seems best, perhaps the person could be involved in researching the possibilities and asked to explain why she is choosing such a program. Clear goals are crucial here, and leaders need not hesitate to challenge if something doesn't seem appropriate. Whenever possible, the person needing a referral should make the contact. If the individual finds the idea of treatment overwhelming, it is appropriate for someone she trusts to accompany her.

**Get consultation at any point in the process.** Persons making referrals often find it an exercise in tough love. Blind spots as well as strengths are confronted. Thus, access to professional consultation is important. With consultants we can reality-test our own perceptions, feelings, and strategies. Rehearsing the interaction of making a referral with an experienced professional has positively affected many an outcome.

There are various styles of consultation. For serious issues, a psychological or psychiatric consult is often necessary. When it comes to inpatient referrals, no religious leader should be expected to make one without a support system. Besides individual consultation, leaders have found assistance and support in dealing with a variety of situations by participating in leadership support groups (sometimes facilitated by a psychological consultant), through ministry groups characterized by case presentations, and through theological reflection groups with other leaders. The latter look at the spiritual issues inherent in a par-

ticular situation. All the aforementioned consultation groups respect the wisdom of each group member and maintain confidentiality.

**Do follow-up.** A person in therapy should be seen as changing somehow. Sometimes things get worse before they get better. Psychotherapy can bring painful issues to the surface, and when this happens people can feel irritable, anxious, down, or frightened before they get better. It is crucial to remember this reality as individuals journey forth in treatment.

During the course of treatment, it is appropriate and helpful for leaders to ask the person in treatment how things are going (the process) but not what they are dealing with (the content). Anyone seeking treatment has a right to privacy and confidentiality. If nothing seems to be changing, it is appropriate to wonder about this observation with the person ("You were in so much pain and angst; I wonder why you haven't experienced any relief"). Stop. Listen to the individual. If she is at an impasse, and if that impasse has been articulated with the therapist and is being worked on, it may be best that the process continue. If the impasse is not being worked on, you may want to begin conversation about alternative treatment.

In summary, when making referrals, leaders can trust their own inclinations and intuitions when they are in touch with their own strengths, fears, and limitations. A referral need not be perfectly executed, just done well enough to be helpful. People are unique, and they grow in their uniqueness as they age. Each person requires a slightly different approach. When we remain in an empathically listening mode, we tend to better approximate need and provide the impetus to take the next steps toward growth.



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# An Instruction on Shame

*Dennis J. O'Hara, Ph.D.*

**P**eople enmeshed in the emotion of shame struggle to begin a relational healing process. The following letter—written to my friend Pat, a young pastoral counselor working hard to serve other ministers of the church—offers an open invitation to others looking for an extended hand.

*Dear Pat:*

Your painful sharing in our last meeting left me wanting to respond further before we meet again. Knowing you had a long period of reflection ahead of you, I have decided to put on paper some thoughts that may facilitate your searching. I hope my words convey the understanding and care I have for you. Also, please understand that I respect your vulnerability, even the parts I have yet to experience.

Shame is truly a hidden emotion, and the challenge of exploring it together is an endeavor of risk, courage, and growth. I encourage you to be open to your most inner voice, your heart of hearts, and attend to what you hear inside. I want to talk with you about what shame is, where it originates, how it develops and manifests itself in our lives, and what we can do to experience our shame openly and move on with the power of caring. I will draw heavily on the seminal work of Dr. Gershen Kaufman, a former Michigan State University colleague of mine, who

offers us the wisdom of his collected works in *Shame: The Power of Caring*. I also want to introduce you to a wonderful woman named Marie, who for several years has shared with me her personal struggle with shame. Although here her identity is disguised to protect her privacy, Marie is now open in a way that her shame had never before permitted. Finally, I want to share myself in a manner that extends an interpersonal bridge to you as you search for awareness and contact.

Let's begin with a reflection of hope from *The Heart of the Enlightened: A Book of Story Meditations* by Anthony De Mello, S.J.:

A traveler lost in the desert despaired of ever finding water. He struggled up one hilltop, then another and another, in the hope of sighting a stream somewhere. He kept looking in every direction with no success.

As he staggered onward, his foot caught on a dry bush and he stumbled to the ground. That's where he lay, with no energy even to rise, no desire to struggle anymore, no hope of surviving his ordeal.

As he lay there, helpless and dejected, he suddenly became aware of the silence of the desert. On all sides a majestic stillness reigned, undisturbed by the slightest sound. Suddenly he raised his head. He had heard something. Something so faint that only the sharpest ear and the deepest silence would lead to its detection: the sound of running water.



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## Striving for perfection may be the shield behind which some choose to hide their shame and futilely compensate for their underlying sense of defectiveness

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Heartened by the hope that the sound aroused in him, he rose and kept moving till he arrived at a stream of fresh, cool water.

DeMello is asking you to allow your heart to hope.

You may be wondering what shame is. It is an emotion and a feeling—an emotional experience of being seen in a painfully diminished way. As an emotional nakedness, that exposure to one's self or to others feels like an internal wound, a pain that can divide us from ourselves and others. Shame is an affect of inferiority and alienation, conferring a profound sense that we are flawed, that something is wrong with us.

You might also wonder where shame comes from. It originates in the context of an interpersonal relationship, usually an early family relationship. It generally involves the broken trust of the parent-child relationship, which leaves the child exposed and vulnerable. When a child exposes himself or herself by sharing a new skill, a piece of treasured artwork, a discovery about his or her body, or an attempt to do something adults do, shame occurs in having the exposure greeted by taunts, laughter, or other humiliating reactions.

Adolescents may experience shame when their heightened self-consciousness is pummeled by family members' or peers' comments about physical changes accompanying puberty. As adults, we may feel shame when our sharing in community is deemed superficial or lacking in spiritual depth, or when our attempts to contribute are met with demeaning rejections that seem to shout "what could you possibly offer us?"

When trauma is frequent or severe at these times of exposure, shame can become a part of the person.

That is, one can learn to internalize shame. When this occurs, one no longer needs a specific trauma to feel shame. It becomes part of the self and has internal access, like an infection that gets past the immune system to every part of one's being, including the formation of one's identity.

Shame is elusive to deal with because words are often inaccurate symbols of the feeling of exposure and the sense of anguish that can accompany such moments. I do want you to understand as much as possible because there is so much life that the secrets of shame keep us from enjoying.

Let me introduce you to Marie. As a young child, trusting her parents, she held expectations of safety and comfort deep in her soul, long before she could understand those concepts. However, shame is sometimes referred to as the "demon of the soul," and demonic it was to Marie.

When Marie was three years old, her father first touched her abusively. Instantly, Marie's life turned from the secure one she silently expected to a shame-based life. For the next forty years, she lived with the demon of shame—that awful, helpless feeling that there was nothing she could ever do to restore herself and remove the stigma of feeling defective, bad, unworthy. Her interpersonal bridge to the world had been demolished.

Do you remember our talks about growth and life passages? As we grow and develop, we pass through various stages that prepare us to live life and answer the central question "Who am I?" The second of Erik Erikson's eight stages of development, occurring roughly between fifteen and thirty months of age, centers on the task of resolving autonomy versus shame and doubt. This period, sometimes called the "terrible twos," is a time of separation for the child and the beginning of the child's assertion of will and control. As with all stages, we can anticipate that trauma suffered in this period will manifest itself throughout life around the developmental issues of separation, abandonment, control, and self-assertion. It is a critical time.

The person with a shame-based identity will seek a defensive shield in order to adapt to the demands of the outer world. The choice of defenses is dependent on cultural influences; the style of the family's conflicts and its strategies for resolving them; and the unique circumstances of the individual, including the person's introverted or extroverted thinking. Defensive shields include rage, contempt, striving for power, striving for perfection, the transfer of blame, and internal withdrawal. Each represents a strategy that, when used alone or in conjunction with others, can safeguard the individual from having shame exposed. Let me give you some examples of these

defenses and how they might look in community or clerical life.

Rage may manifest itself as hostility toward others or bitterness. Extroverted individuals are more likely to express some of the rage to others, while introverted individuals are more likely to keep the rage inside. In either case, the effect can be devastating. As Kaufman notes, there is no more certain poison for the self than holding in the rage and fermenting the bitterness. As each of us knows, coming into contact with an embittered individual usually leaves one with a bad feeling. An example is the sister in community whose face has long since said goodbye to relaxed smiles and who seems to be serving a life sentence. Similarly, we can see the rage in the explosive priest who so masterfully sets up others to reject him and then suffers with his abandonment feelings, in parish after parish.

Striving for perfection may be the shield behind which some choose to hide their shame and futilely compensate for their underlying sense of defectiveness. This strategy is doomed from the start, because the perfectionist never develops an internal sense of what is “good enough” and constantly seeks external standards that dispute self-worth and confirm internal worthlessness. I know this has been one of your personal demons. But look at what happens to the brother who indicates that he is work-addicted and smiles as he adds another meeting to an already impossible schedule. Is he trying to outwork (as in outrun) his shame? Similarly, the perfectionistic formation director serves as an idealized and unattainable model to impressionable young sisters looking to answer their identity questions and establish an interpersonal bridge to a new life. Her perfectionism can model exactly how not to share one’s humanness, including one’s shame.

Internal withdrawal is an attempt to retreat to a deep interior place where the agony of exposure or the loss of future relationships can be avoided. Marie, after a period of contempt for authority, frequent sexual acting out, and disruptive behavior, developed internal withdrawal and a life of fantasy. She, like others who develop this shield, managed to avoid responsibility and involvement for many years. She retreated into a vague spirituality dominated by a gentle Jesus who would heal her and return her to a life she had lost. Luke, in the gospel, speaks of such a healing when he writes:

They sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. When he came to land, he was met by a man from the town who was possessed by demons. For a long time he had not worn any clothes; he did not live in a house, but among the tombstones. On seeing Jesus,

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**Internal withdrawal is an attempt to retreat to a deep interior place where the agony of exposure or the loss of future relationships can be avoided**

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he began to shriek; then he fell at his feet and exclaimed at the top of his voice, “Jesus, Son of God Most High, why do you meddle with me? Do not torment me, I beg you.” By now Jesus was ordering the unclean spirit to come out of the man. This spirit had taken hold of him many a time. The man used to be tied with chains and fetters, but he could break his bonds and the demon would drive him into places of solitude. “What is your name?” Jesus demanded. “Legion,” he answered, because the demons who entered him were many. They pleaded with him not to order them back to the abyss. It happened that a large herd of swine was feeding nearby on the hillside, and the demons asked him to permit them to enter the swine. This he granted. The demons then came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd charged down the bluff into the lake, where they drowned.

Unfortunately for Marie, she wandered among the tombstones for many years, unable to make the interpersonal bridge necessary to realize her fantasy. She was pleasant but blank, competent but unavailable, internally vigilant but looking with her eyes cast downward. She lived a shame-based life, constantly replaying her internalized feelings of shame in a joyless reverie only occasionally punctuated by spiritual insights and brief respites. The death of Marie’s father opened her to the possibility of reclaiming her life, and she began the long process of risking exposure again, becoming vulnerable, acknowledging her imperfect humanness, and letting her courage and relational caring carry her beyond shame.

In his book *Shame: The Power of Caring*, Kaufman writes:

Even though the aftermath of shame can be severe, the way to a self-affirming identity lies in the deeply human capacity to be fully restored, in the knowledge that one



individual can restore the interpersonal bridge with another, however late it may be, and in the awareness that human relationships are reparable. Through such restoring of the bridge, shame is transcended. The significant other who was involved in the original shame-inducing experiences need not be the one who must restore the bridge. Someone who later becomes significant, friend, colleague, or therapist can become that person.

We carry with us always the deep emotional impact of shame, and yet when someone deeply valued risks his or her own exposure to become vulnerable and openly acknowledges his imperfect humanness, his part in making us feel shame, we are carried beyond shame. The growth impact of having someone take that risk with us is far greater than if he or she had never triggered off a shame experience in the first place. Severing the interpersonal bridge when it is followed by restoring that bridge is the healing process itself, the growth process. This is the process that helps someone move beyond shame toward a self-affirming identity.

For you, Pat, the strategies for growth are within your grasp. Growing beyond shame begins with the facing of one's shame in a relationship that is caring. More specifically, it involves reestablishing an interpersonal bridge through trust, acceptance, and loving. It means having an intimate friend, who will love and care for the real you even as you seek your real self. Some of the qualities of such a relationship are:

- feeling cared for in the presence of your judgmental thoughts and negative feelings toward another;
- feeling accepted when energy is low and interest minimal in community prayer or leisure activities;
- feeling trust, when you experience flashbacks, that the friend will stay with you;
- feeling understood when you project your anger, hurt, embarrassment, and guilt;
- feeling appreciation when the friend sets limits on what he or she can do and takes responsibility for his or her life—modeling for you and affirming your process;
- feeling the warmth that comes from another who lets you care for him or her;
- feeling a friend's patience when it is so difficult to accept the love he or she wants or needs to give you;
- feeling the sharing of your experience as you explore your life, with the assurance that another will respect your individual pursuit of truth;
- feeling the compassion of being seen and responded to as an adult who carries a young self within at all times.

These are the dynamics that can restore the interpersonal bridge. In addition, however, it is important to discover the original sources of internalized shame, to determine our own needs, to go to those who can help and not to those who cannot or will not. This involves making peace with the past and accepting that some of our core conflicts remain with us, that some holes are permanent. Becoming the best person we can be becomes our goal as we seek to form a self with integrity.

Robert Wicks, a psychologist at Loyola in Baltimore, has written that "once we acknowledge our limits, our potential is almost limitless." I think there is much to reflect on in his words. Also, I think it is important to learn new coping mechanisms that are flexible and to acknowledge that mistakes are part of life, not a sign of failure. A wise teacher of mine often remarked that unacknowledged mistakes were the only ones that signified a failure to learn and grow. This attitude establishes a positive sense of security. Finally, it is essential to build our capacity for self-affirmation. Here, our uniqueness is the key. We must learn that as we affirm ourselves as distinct and lovable, we can continue to feel affirmed in the face of defeat, rejection, and failure. While we may feel shame throughout our life, the self-affirmations can fill our internal experience and lead to a strong, positive identity.

This is a lot to think about, Pat, but let me try to summarize. I see four developmental tasks: forming an interpersonal bridge, developing integrity in the self, creating a positive internal sense of security, and building a self-nurturing, self-affirming identity. Our hope in healing shame comes only with the risk of letting others see it and feeling their caring for us as we are.

*Dennis*



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# Dreams in a Spiritual Life

Judith A. Reger, S.S.J.

**H**uman beings have a deep desire to communicate with God—to experience God as listening and responding to our cries and needs, to hear God's Word, and to know God's presence and love communicated uniquely to each of us. Unfortunately, we often miss God's communication. We try to clothe God in the limitations of our humanity, expecting God's communication only in certain forms and during our waking hours. By doing this, we miss an important form of communication: our dreams.

Many people, including biblical figures, tell us that God is communicating with us even while we sleep. For example, Morton Kelsey, author of *The Other Side of Silence*, writes that when he was bothered by insomnia, he would be angry because he was unable to return to sleep. One day, a psychologist friend asked him if someone might be trying to get through to him in the same way that God called Samuel in the night. "From then on," Kelsey says, "I began to get up in the night and write down my dreams and then try to listen." He found that this was the best time to listen to God and to tell God about his dreams and feelings. This may be true for us, too, at critical times in our lives.

## DREAMS IN THE BIBLE

Scripture shows that the Israelite people understood dreams as a means of divine communication. For ex-

ample, in Genesis 28:10–22—the story of Jacob's dream of the ladder between heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending—God speaks to Jacob. Upon waking, Jacob believes in God's presence with him and makes a vow to God. Jacob names Bethel a sacred place because he encountered God there.

Matthew's gospel tells the story of Joseph's dreams. Through an angel, Joseph is given information that allays his fears about Mary and assists him in his decision. In a second dream, Joseph is warned about danger to his family and is given a solution. Later information from an angel in a dream lets him know it is safe to move again (Matt 1:20–21, 2:13). Much later, in Matthew 27:19, Pilate's wife sends Pilate a message: "Have nothing to do with that man; I have been upset all day by a dream I had about him." Pilate does not listen to his wife—but the dreamers consider their new awareness a divine message.

Similarly, in our dreams we are often given new information or prodded to pay attention to things we are not heeding in our waking life. Sometimes the information may be a warning about the dangerous path we are taking in life, a reassurance that God's grace is with us, a promise that what is causing anguish now will be healed or resolved, or an offer of assistance in making a decision. Some dreams wake us up to the need for healing or help begin the healing journey within us.



## VARIETY IN IMAGES

Some dreams contain ordinary, everyday images—for example, a woman dreams that she is standing on a ladder, replacing a ceiling sprinkler. Some are filled with extraordinary or even mythical images—for example, a beautiful white horse about to jump through a wide window in a large house. Others have a numinous quality—for example, a man dreams that he is standing in an exceptionally beautiful meadow of flowers on a hill with his deceased parents, who appear smiling and peaceful. Expecting God to communicate only in direct religious images or words in our dreams only shows our propensity for putting limits on God.

Dreams have the quality of mystery—not the “you solve this” type of mystery, but the “standing in awe, pondering in your heart” kind. They let us know we are in the presence of a power beyond ourselves.

Looked at in this way, dreams invite us to approach with attentiveness, openness, and reverence, as if treading on sacred ground. In contemplating a dream, we can let go of controlling, analyzing, grasping, trying to figure it all out, needing to have it be clear and manageable. We can let it be a mystery that embraces both the deep, unconscious part of ourselves and the divine mystery of God.

## PSYCHOMYSTICAL ROOTS

This mystery is acknowledged in writings about mysticism, as well as in the analytical psychology of Carl Jung, who called the process of coming home to one's self the individuation process. In that movement of growth toward wholeness, one comes to union with the Divine Presence within, as well as with the *imago Dei* of one's being. There is a growing integration of one's conscious awareness with the unconscious elements of one's self.

Writing in *Analytical Psychology*, Jung reminds us that our conscious mind is characterized by a certain narrowness, being able to contain only a few simultaneous thoughts at a given time. The unconscious, on the other hand, is a vast realm of unknown extent. As Jung put it, “When we say ‘the unconscious’ we often mean to convey something by the term, but as a matter of fact we simply convey that we do not know what the unconscious is.” Even though we have learned much about the unconscious, there is always more.

In “Answer to Job,” an essay in *The Portable Jung*, he speaks about the impossibility of separating the psychological and the spiritual in this mystery of the unconscious. Jung indicates that we cannot distinguish what comes from God and what comes from the unconscious. Within the unconscious, there is

an archetype of wholeness occupying a central position, very close to the God-image within us. It is this archetype, the self, “from which we can no longer distinguish the God-image empirically.”

William Johnston writes about this mystery in *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion*. In his words, “In the mystical life . . . [there is] an inner or downward journey to the core of the personality where dwells the great mystery called God—God who cannot be known directly. . . .” In this process, consciousness expands to include more and more data from the unconscious.

In *Faith and Violence*, Thomas Merton writes about the role of this mysterious area of our being, the unconscious, in the discovery of one's true spiritual self. He emphasizes “the overwhelming and almost totally neglected importance of exploring this spiritual unconscious of man,” which Rhenish mystics and Zen masters point to and name the “ground” or “base” of the soul, as well as “your original face before you were born.”

Dreams affirm the reality that on the spiritual journey, we come to know the mystery of our true self and the divine mystery of God simultaneously. It is from the unconscious that the images of our dreams come. Some of these images are from our personal experience and learning, and some are from the area of the collective unconscious that we share with all other human beings.

## DREAMS HELP GROWTH AND HEALING

The experience of many dreamers demonstrates that dreams have the ability to express and foster awareness, growth, and healing. Along the way, they give us information, but they do not make decisions for us. Our conscious ego is responsible for the decision making in our lives. We often want clarity immediately and thus may move quickly to conclusions about the meaning of a dream or dream image. But the meaning of a dream more often unfolds when we ponder it carefully—associating, dialoging, or identifying with the images, letting our own blind spots be enlightened. Since dreams have multiple meanings, their significance often continues to unfold with time and attention.

Dreams often contain an element of surprise—something new, or perhaps a reminder of something we had forgotten or devalued. For example, a woman dreamed of being at a large dinner, where she saw a beautifully decorated sheet cake that was crushed and disfigured on one side. Through that image, she was reminded of her spirit, crushed through certain events of her life. She recognized that she had been devaluing herself in her current situation.



Other dreams relive aspects of a trauma that is in need of healing, and thus are part of the healing process. During a time of family trauma, a young woman had repeated dreams of being chased by a dark male figure, from whom she ran screaming. She came to recognize her fear and realized that her running recalled a time in her earlier life when she was sexually abused.

In a time of decision making, dreams may be part of the discernment process. When we are being pulled in various directions, dreams can aid us in recognizing the movements of various spirits within. Consider the dream of a woman who needed to make a decision at a confusing and critical moment. In her dream she is alone, driving her car, when it suddenly goes over a cliff and turns upside down. She falls out, landing on a narrow ledge. Grabbing a branch just above her, she calls out, "Help, help," hoping someone will rescue her. She is panic-stricken when she looks below, believing that if she lets go or falls, she will die. In being with and praying about this dream, the woman discovered her strong fear of letting go in one aspect of her life in making her decision. That realization helped her to recognize the invitation to trust and to be aware of the obstacle that fear had become in making the decision.

## DREAMS REFLECT SPIRIT

Clearly, dreams give us information about the state of one's spirit. Fred Maples, S.J., a Jungian analyst, has said that dreams are a personal parable of our inner life. They are unique to each of us, originating from a power beyond the conscious self. When we are ready to listen to the communication in our dreams, our conscious attitude and some action steps may help us become open to what our dreams have to offer. The following steps can enhance our attentiveness to dreams and to the message God is offering through the "parable" of the dream:

- Keep a pen and notebook by your bedside to record dreams upon waking.
- If you know you had a dream but can't remember it, lie still and be gentle in trying to recall it. You may find it helpful to focus on what you are feeling as you awake.
- Spend some time each day reflecting on what is going on within you. Become aware of your inner pulls, triggers, nudges, and emotions in response to the day's events and relationships. Examination

of your consciousness near the end of the day is a prayerful way of bringing to awareness the inner terrain of your being, noticing the day's events and interactions, and contemplating how God has been communicating with you.

- When possible, follow up a dream with some "work" on it. Depending on the amount of time available, you may wish to try some of the numerous techniques suggested in a book such as *Dreams and Spiritual Growth: A Christian Approach to Dreamwork* by Louis Savary and coauthors.

During the time of being with the dream in prayer, you may want to speak with God about the dream images, figures, or relationships, as well as your feelings or memories of past events. Some of the following questions may be useful:

- In this dream, is there anything I need?
- What do I want to ask of God or express to God?
- What does God want me to know?
- What gift or grace does the dream bring to me?
- What is the message of this dream to me?
- Is there any scripture passage that comes to mind? (Often, praying or reflecting with a related passage deepens the gift of the dream.)

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Johnston, W. *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion*. San Francisco, California: Harper & Row, 1978.
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# BOOK REVIEWS

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*The Singing Bird Will Come: An AIDS Journal* by John Richard Noonan, Ph.D. Foreword by Daniel Berrigan, S.J. Albany, New York: Canticle Press, 1997. 132 pages. \$10.95.

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**T**his is an amazingly generous book: generous in the telling and in the editing. The outline of Dr. John Richard Noonan's story is by now achingly familiar: a gifted young man tests positive for the AIDS virus and begins the relentless walk toward death. His partner has the same diagnosis. Dick and Gary celebrate their relationship and treasure their friends, knowing all the while where their journey will lead.

*The Singing Bird Will Come*, Dick's journal, allows him to process his reactions and struggles. As a psychologist, Dick knows well the value of reflecting. As a Christian, he moves from reflection to prayer instinctively. God is a longtime friend. Dick's faith is tried, tested, tortured through the years of the journal. It does not waver. The generosity of Dick's journal lies in the depth of his faith and in his ability to describe his spiritual experience. With incredible honesty, he records both the progress of the disease and what Ignatius of Loyola called the inevitability of prayer as he is brought to that place where one cannot but pray. His sister Mary Rose, who edits the journal, notes that once Dick is able to talk with his family, especially his mother, his monologues can become dialogues and he has no further need to write.

As the journal begins, Dick and Gary have relocated to Potsdam, New York. They set about shaping their home. Dick refinishes furniture, checks out garage sales, delights in restoring and refurbishing old pieces to enhance the house. Simultaneously, the house that is his body (*body* in Old English is *ban-hous*, or *bone-house*) is steadily deteriorating, even

though Dick faithfully follows his medical regime. He fears disfigurement, especially as he observes the lesions of his friends with AIDS when he visits them.

The title of the book comes from a proverb: "If I keep a green branch in my heart, the singing bird will come." Bird and branch speak of hope; one is reminded of Emily Dickinson's "Hope is the thing with feathers / that perches in the soul / and sings the tune without the words."

Dick's last entry is December 16, 1993, five and a half months before his death. He goes to the wake of a friend who has died from AIDS. "I keep reminding myself," he writes, "that God is as present in the sad things of life as in the happy ones; it's a hard reminder."

This final entry marks the coming of the singing bird: Dick's sister Mary Rose has told their mother and brother about his AIDS. Katy, Dick's younger sister and closest friend, has known for some time; Mary Rose and Ellen, another sister, have known for several weeks. The family circle is now complete; there is honesty, openness, unconditional love. Dick writes:

I marvel at the limitless capacity of my family to make love real through their actions. . . . I feel a peace which I haven't experienced for years. The singing bird has come. I have thought often before now . . . that I am humbled to have been part of this family and, particularly, the son of this woman. It is she who taught me that my life is a gift, my happiness a choice, and that always, no matter what, love heals. To you who have loved me longer and harder than anyone, dear mother, to you, all my love.

Dr. Noonan's profession as a psychologist called him to be a caring healer in many lives. He continues this caring—and surely this healing—in his journal. *The Singing Bird Will Come* will offer consolation and assistance to many readers. Dick Noonan and his family have been generous in their giving.

—Katherine Hanley, C.S.J.



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*Sisters in Crisis: The Tragic Unraveling of Women's Religious Communities* by Ann Carey. Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1997. 367 pages. \$19.95.

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**A**nn Carey has written a book that is sure to stir up controversy. From the outset, her thesis is clear: over the past three decades, two very different groups of women religious have coexisted in the United States: traditional and change-oriented sisters. Included in the traditional group are those seen as adhering to understandings of religious life as outlined in the documents of Vatican II and other church legislation. In contrast, change-oriented women religious and institutes are characterized as seeking a new definition of religious life by expanding their boundaries beyond conventional understandings associated with that way of life.

The author has done her homework. She cites numerous documents from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life, the archives of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the secular and religious press, and other sources as she builds her case. Carey traces renewal in U.S. women's communities from the days of Pius XII through the present papacy. She points out, for example, that it was Pius XII who first challenged members of religious institutes to renew themselves and their organizations, well in advance of Vatican Council II. She also reports accurately that resistance on the part of the leadership of sisters, priests, and brothers was the initial response to the request for long-overdue and reasonable change.

Carey writes about the extraordinary chapters of renewal to which Paul VI called all religious institutes and the controversies that followed on the decisions that were made during some of these gatherings. She offers a view of the work of the Quinn Commission, the events that led up to the formation of a second conference for women religious in the United States, and the more recent synod on religious life that resulted in John Paul II's *Vita Consecrata*. Finally, the author focuses on recent critiques of contemporary religious life and its practice in the United States: the work of Patricia Wittberg, S.C., for example, and the comprehensive and provocative results of the FORUS project.

While Carey's descriptions begin rather benignly, she positions herself more clearly when she reaches the years of the Second Vatican Council and its aftermath. She points out—rightly so, I'd suggest—that the decade of the 1960s was a difficult one in which to introduce renewal to religious life in the United

States. The same, though, can be said about that decade's impact on so many other aspects of Catholic life affected by the Council's decisions.

There is, however, a troubling hard edge to Carey's book. For example, she imputes unsavory motives to some of the change-oriented sisters and dismisses most of their leaders as unidimensional radical feminists. Many of those categorized as traditional come across as rather wooden. Both groups deserve better. One must also wonder about the author's evenhandedness, as she allows striking omissions that many readers will notice quickly. Her discussion about the Transformative Elements is one example.

Carey reports accurately that a joint 1989 assembly of the CMSM and LCWR (Conference of Major Superiors of Men and Leadership Conference of Women Religious), made up\* of 800 women and men religious with some responsibility for the direction of vowed members in their respective institutes, developed a list of elements that they suggested would characterize the living out of religious life at the beginning of the next millennium. Five of these elements were eventually judged by those gathered to be central: prophetic witness, contemplative attitudes toward life, a focus of ministry on the poor and marginalized, a spirituality of wholeness and global awareness, and charism and mission as sources of identity. Several additional elements developed by the group failed to gain consensus agreement.

When illustrating the Transformative Elements in her book, though, Carey surprisingly cites as her only example one element that did not win the acceptance of the assembly members. She fails to mention any of the five that did. It is an unfortunate omission and one that gives the reader a distorted view of the topic.

Carey also appears unwilling to accept this fact about organizational change and its consequences: planned change is neither more tranquil nor more predictable than unplanned change. Any period of transition gives rise to false starts, excesses and failures, and uncertainty about the future.

Two aspects of *Sisters in Crisis* particularly disappointed this reviewer. First of all, the author misses this important point: whether you classify women religious as traditional or change-oriented, all love the church and religious life. Otherwise, why would they stay and work so hard on behalf of both?

Second, Carey's tone and the consistent manner in which she caricatures many individuals and events eventually becomes so alienating that, for some readers, potentially thought-provoking points in her book will be overshadowed. For example, she suggests, and I would agree, that the findings of the FORUS (Future of Religious Orders in the United States) study provide important elements for any blueprint



of a future for religious life in the United States. Promoting vocations to religious life and the shape of formation programs are, for example, essential and pressing matters. So, too, are the witness of community life, corporate ministries, a clear and distinct identity for religious life, and the presence of passionate, prayerful, and happy apostles among religious men and women.

It is hoped that the publication of Ann Carey's book will encourage others to delve into the archives of the last thirty years and challenge all who love religious life to evaluate the experimentation of the last three decades so as to decide what is of the Spirit and what is not. If so, she has done us a great service. My fear, though, is that her book may serve only to cause deeper divisions and greater mistrust—and that it will, in the end, hurt the gift of the Spirit to the church that we call religious life.

—Sean D. Sammon, F.M.S.

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*The Masculine Spirit: Resources for Reflective Living* by Max Oliva, S.J. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1997. 160 pages. \$8.95.

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**F**ather Max Oliva begins *The Masculine Spirit* by recognizing that today many men are confused about their identity and role in society. The macho image is common enough, but it can conceal a deep-seated insecurity about maleness and what society interprets that to mean. Taking a reflective and prayerful look at the male spirit at its best, and drawing largely on his own experience and the testimony of many men who confided to him about their experience, Max Oliva documents a conclusion that should not be too surprising: poor parenting has a lot to do with the kind of problems that arise in adult life.

Society, too, is to blame for expecting men to be dominant, to never cry or admit failure or weakness. As one man put it, when he was younger he had a total of four emotions: glad, sad, mad, and bad. That allows for very little subtlety or sensitivity. In some men the emotions are reduced to two: fight and the other "f" word. Such stereotypes of what it is to be human reduce God's masterpiece to the level of the lower primates.

Of course, these primitive instincts can be sublimated, elaborated, complexified, and ritualized until

the raw nature that drives them is covered with a thin veneer of civilization. But even the most talented men are often unaware of the spirit that moves them. They have very little self-knowledge because they fail to pause, take stock of themselves, and discuss their problems with others who are wiser and more mature.

The central message of Father Oliva's book develops the four categories outlined by Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette in their book *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine*. In a shorthand fashion, one might say that "King" symbolizes the creative individual who is in charge of his own life and emotions and is able to bring out the best in others. "Warrior" represents the person with a passion for a just cause—the fearless master of strategy. "Magician" stands for the wise man, the intuitive, the scientist—the one who has integrated his spiritual and physical energies. "Lover" can be the self-seeker who, at his best, is the romantic (Eros), or the one who, like God, loves unconditionally and is always concerned for the well-being of the beloved (Agape). The most profound kind of friendship between man and woman is called Amor.

Each of the four archetypes has its dark side. The King can be cruel and domineering, manipulating others for selfish goals. The Warrior-Hero can turn sadistic or masochistic, while the Magician, who has genuine spiritual powers, can use them to deceive others. Lovers, true and false, can abuse their passion.

Oliva's writing blends stories, examples, scripture texts, and testimony from his own experience as a successful salesman who had a worldly view of life and sex before finding it all barren and empty. He subsequently turned to God, entered into the Society of Jesus, and was ordained. Today he is in considerable demand as a leader of retreats for priests here and abroad. Oliva is frank in discussing his personal failings and describing how he sought to overcome them through study, counseling, and prayer.

Many of the tips in *The Masculine Spirit* are in line with the teachings of Saint Ignatius in the Spiritual Exercises. The book ends with a useful presentation of ways to examine one's level of awareness in areas such as thanksgiving, the prayer of petition, or making firm resolutions for the future. Those seriously pursuing the spiritual path are urged to keep a journal of insights and experiences, which can prove useful, when reread from time to time, as a barometer indicating one's progress in maturing—or a falling off from one's earlier fervor and dedication.

This book is a most valuable work for the reflective man. Women will also find *The Masculine Spirit* compelling.

—James M. Somerville